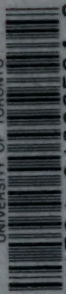



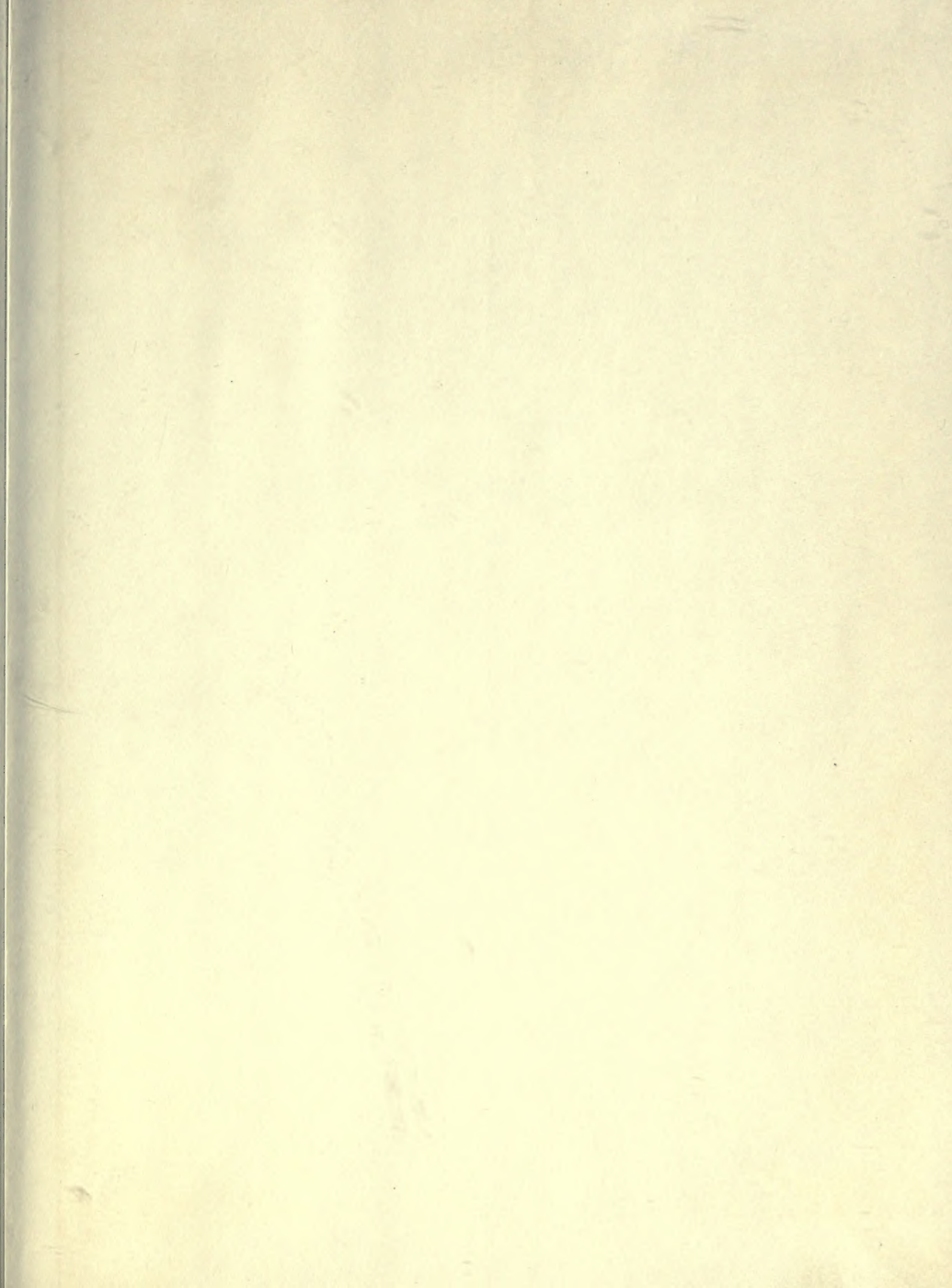
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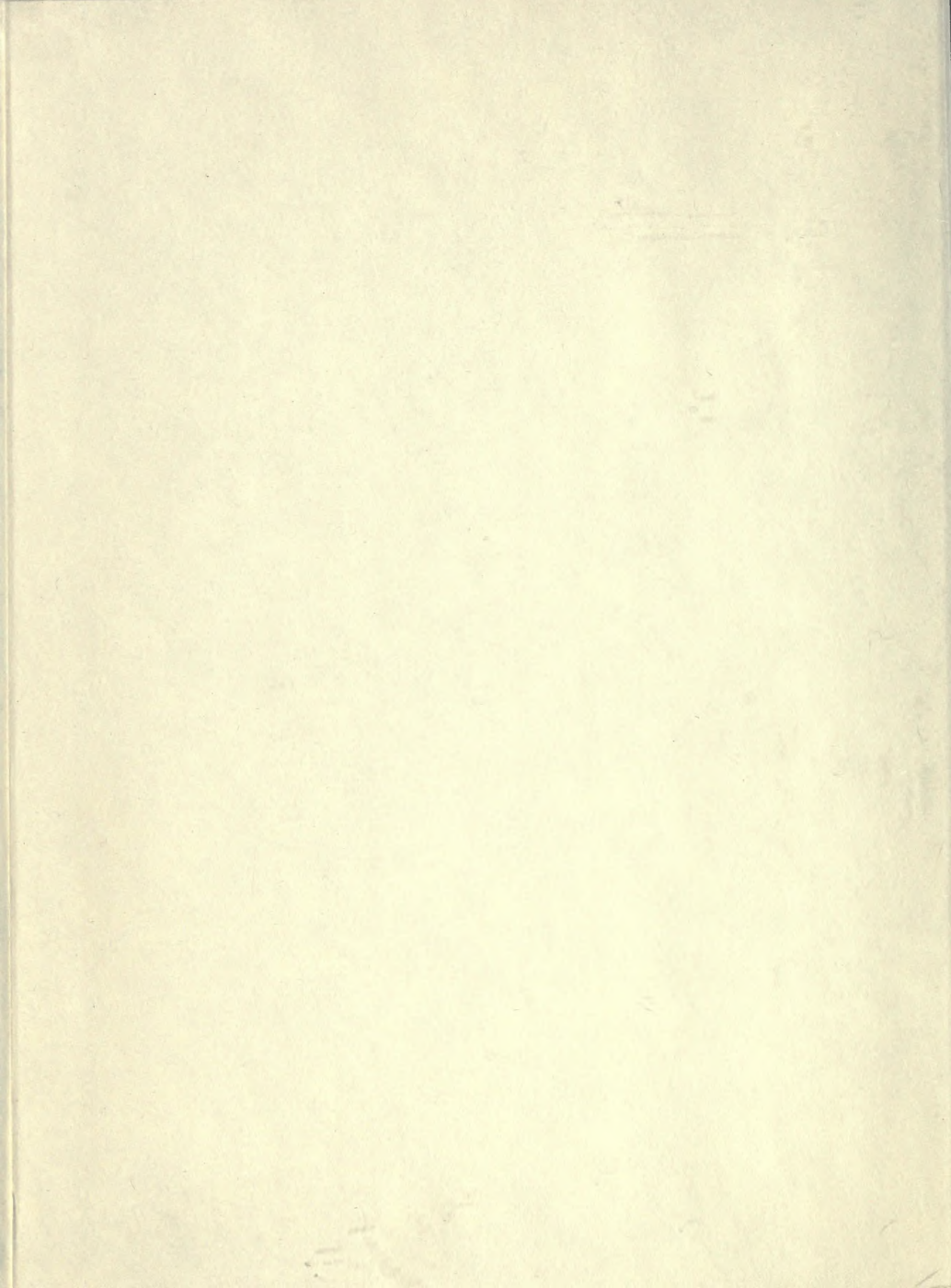


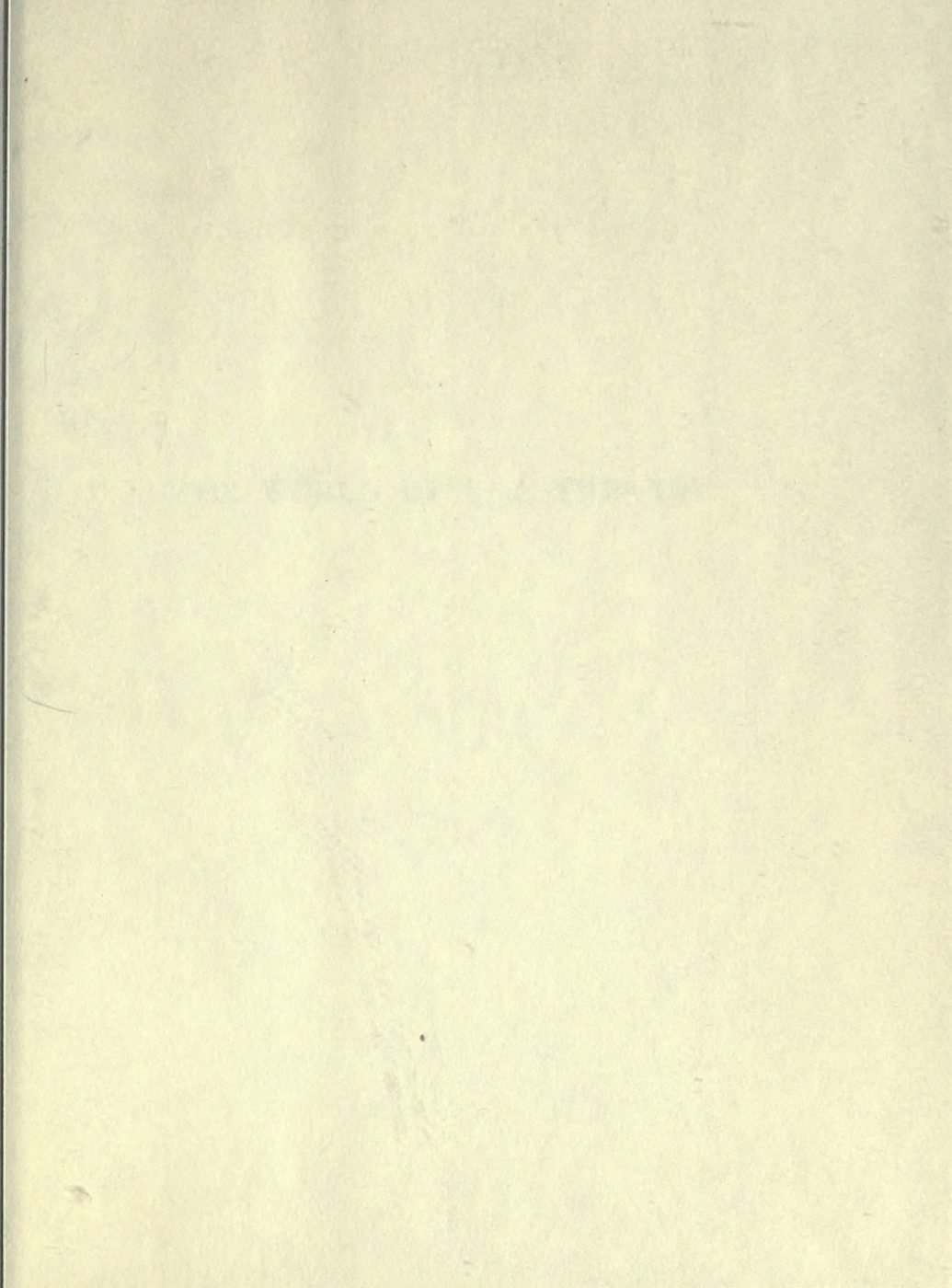
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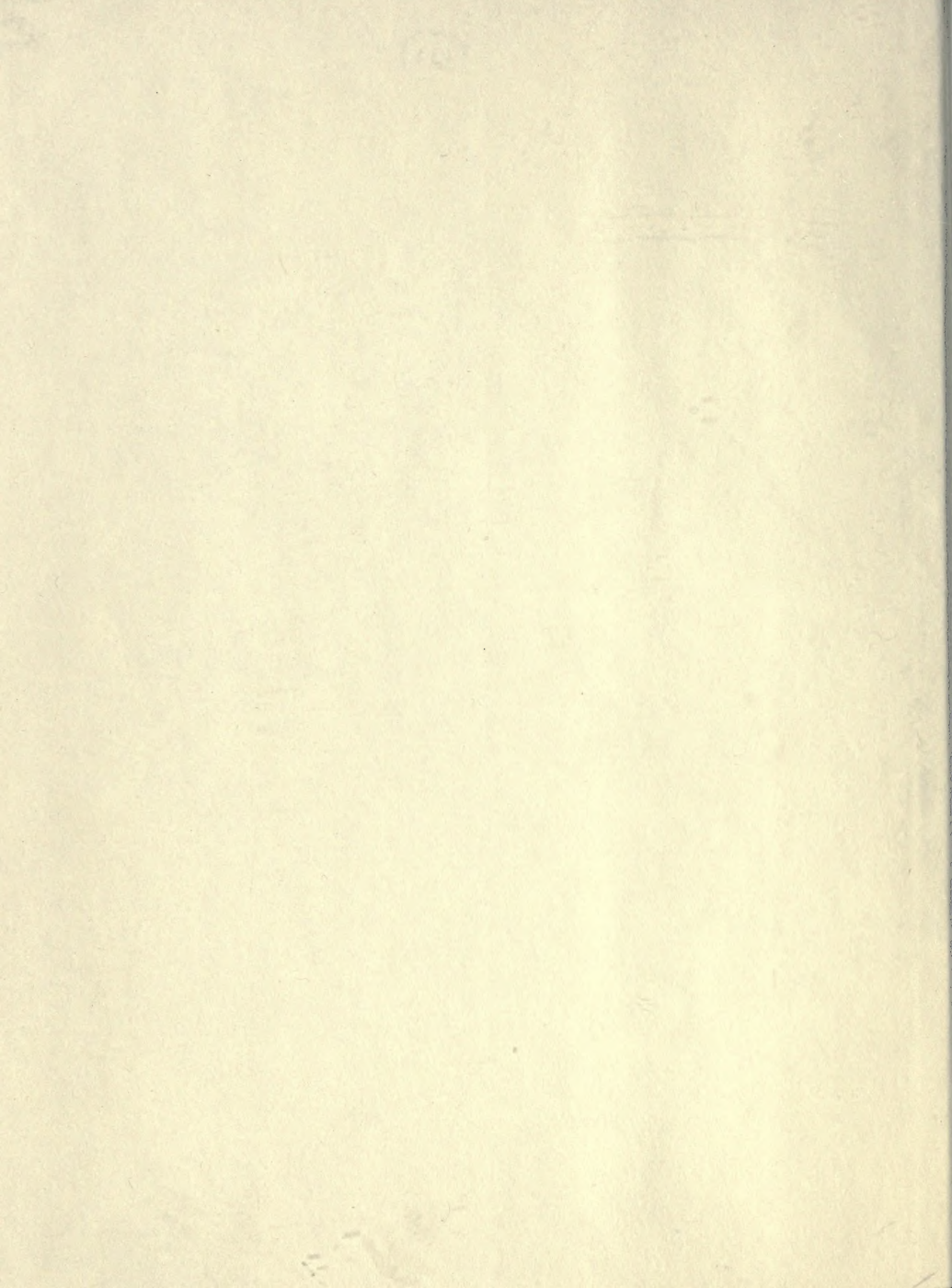


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THE WORLD OF THE THEATRE

THE WORKS OF THE LITERARY

THE WORLD OF THE THEATRE

IMPRESSIONS AND MEMOIRS, MARCH 1920-1921.

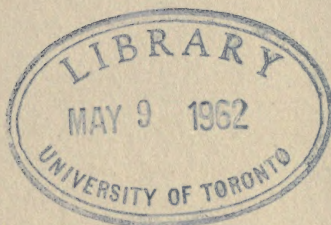
James BY
Thames
J. T. GREIN
III



LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

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INTRODUCTORY.

Before presenting this batch of criticisms in all the impersonality of their original journalism, I suppose I must introduce myself and shew my credentials. This is rather a difficult matter ; for, like other folk, I may not see myself quite as others see me ; and my theatrical credentials are of such a kind that it is impossible for me to draw them up myself without either seeming egotistical or doing an injustice to the importance of the movement I had, and still have, at heart.

In this dilemma I had resolved not to introduce myself at all when it occurred to me that I might extricate myself by taking the opinion of my old friend Bernard Shaw. He is my contemporary and was my colleague in those days when, as I think, I did the State some service. If he cannot introduce me nobody can. I wrote him an artless enquiry as to what he thinks I ought to say about myself. Here is his reply :—

“MY DEAR GREIN : It is now very close on thirty years since you madly began an apparently hopeless attempt to bring the English theatre into some sort of relation with contemporary culture. Matthew Arnold had suggested that step ; but nobody in the theatre took the slightest notice of him, because nobody in the theatre knew of the existence of such a person as Matthew Arnold. That was what was the matter with the theatre then. There was nothing wrong with the acting : I cannot remember any actor or actress then occupying a leading position who could be called an amateur or a duffer : they had all been “through the mill,” and could make intruders who had not, look ridiculous. The theatres were better managed than they are now : the front of the house was not always controlled by the bar ; and at the best theatres all petty cadgings like charges for programs and cloak room fees were abolished. The public was so seriously interested in the theatre that it booked seats months in advance : in fact, it was by the booking that a manager knew when his run was coming to an end. Photographs of actors and actresses cost a shilling each ; and at this price the Stereoscopic Company did a big trade in them. At every point except the one point of culture and contact with the life of the time the theatre was in a more dignified

position than it occupies to-day. If you and I could have set the Bancrofts, the Kendals, the Rorkes, Hare and Wyndham and Irving and Forbes Robertson and Ada Rehan, to work in live contemporary drama, the London stage would have led Europe triumphantly. Forbes Robertson's *Cæsar* proved it."

"As it was, these artists were kept up to the mark by the continual effort to pass off literary scarecrows as heroes and heroines. The generation which succeeded them at the *fin de siècle* acquired this art and acquired nothing else (never having had the chance); so that you got actors and actresses who had an enchanting power of persuading you that they could say and do the most wonderful things when the moment came; but the author had to be particularly careful to get the curtain down before it came; for when you called on them, as Shakespear does for instance, not for suggestion, but for execution, they knew better than to give themselves away by trying. Shakespear then became physically impossible. As the notion of performing his plays as he meant them to be performed never occurred to anyone but Mr. William Poel, who was regarded consequently as the absurdest of cranks, the Bard had already become a mere stalking-horse for the scene painter, the costumier, and the spectacular artists generally. His plays were presented in mutilated fragments, divided into acts with long waits between, in which form they were so horribly boresome, being mostly unintelligible, that only the most powerful personal fascination could induce playgoers to endure him. As long as this fascination was associated with great executive power, Shakespear did not always "spell ruin," as the phrase went then. Whilst the actor could not only look as if he could say tremendous things, but could actually say them tremendously when he got the chance, it was possible for Barry Sullivan, who turned his back on London with disdain because he lost £800 in three months and was not used to such treatment, to die worth £100,000. But when the fascination was divorced from executive power, the Shakespearian game was up for the young of the old school. It was the young of the new school who discovered that Poel had really struck the trail. Then you got Granville Barker,

Drinkwater, Bridges Adams, and Fagan establishing genuine Shakespear on the English stage, and extracting from the play the fascination for which their fathers would have looked to the actor alone."

"Now you may ask what this has to do with you, who never meddled with Shakespear. I assure you you had a great deal to do with it.

When you first desperately stuck an advertisement into the papers to say that an unheard-of enterprise called the Independent Theatre would on a certain Sunday night and Monday afternoon perform an unheard-of play, totally unlike any play then current in the theatrical market; when the papers thereupon declared that the manager of the theatre ought to be prosecuted for keeping a disorderly house, and that you and the foreign blackguard named Ibsen who was your accomplice, should be deported as obvious undesirables, you made a hole in the dyke; and the weight of the flood outside did the rest. When you declared that you would bring to light treasures of unacted English drama grossly suppressed by the managers of that day, you found that there was not any unacted English drama except two acts of an unfinished play (begun and laid aside eight years before) by me; but it was the existence of the Independent Theatre that made me finish that play, and by giving me the experience of its rehearsal and performance, revealed the fact (to myself among others) that I possessed the gift of "fingering" the stage. That old play now seems as remote and old-fashioned as *Still Waters Run Deep* or *London Assurance*; but the newspapers of 1892 raged over it for a whole fortnight. Everything followed from that: the production of *Arms and the Man* by Miss Horniman and Florence Farr at the Avenue Theatre, Miss Horniman's establishment of Repertory Theatres in Dublin and Manchester, the Stage Society, Granville H. Barker's tentative matinées of *Candida* at the Court Theatre, the full-blown management of Vedrenne and Barker, Edie Craig's *Pioneers*, and the final relegation of the Nineteenth Century London theatre to the dust-bin by Barrie. At present the cry in the papers is that the theatre is hopelessly out of date, that it needs fresh air, new ideas, scrapping of traditions and conventions. The most famous apostle of the new theatre has declared publicly that what has been

holding the theatre back for twenty years past and making all reform impossible is not Sardou but Shaw. If only we could give the young lions a ride on Well's Time Machine and take them back to 1892!"

"Well, more power to their elbows! I am always delighted to hear a clamor for new ideas, or indeed for ideas of any sort, in the theatre. So, I have no doubt, are you. But the clamorers will hardly see a revolution like the one you began by making the hole in the dyke. It is the second revolution that England owes to a Dutchman."

G.B.S.

After this, the less I say about myself, the better. I am very well content to be the man who made the hole in the dyke. In letting Ibsen in I let the ocean in; and I certainly now look round sometimes in bewilderment at the extent to which the old landmarks have been obliterated. Nevertheless it remains true that *plus ça change plus c'est la même chose*. There are still plenty of people and plenty of theatres, plenty of audiences and plenty of actors (to say nothing of authors), who are still just where they were when they hooted me in 1890. I do not feel that my warfare is accomplished yet, either as manager or critic; and so I still urge my views on the public as to the present and future of the theatre—in this volume, for instance, which I now present without further ado.

J.T.G.

CHAPTER I.—March 13th, 1920.

Diagnosis.

WHENEVER the British theatre is discussed I cannot help thinking of the lines which Kipling wrote in the days of the Boer War—

When you've shouted Rule Britannia,

When you've sung God Save the Queen.

When you've finished killing Kruger with your mouth.

On all sides we hear that since the war the British drama has gone down. It is nowhere. For a nation of fifty millions, our production is practically sterile. One great work like Drinkwater's "Lincoln" is hailed as a redeemer. When we compare our drama with the small countries across the Channel, such as Belgium and Holland, we may feel abashed at their intellectual superiority, their width of horizon, their indescribable love of the theatre. In Amsterdam alone in one week you could see Shakespeare's "Hamlet" and "As You Like It," to say nothing of Strindberg, Hauptmann, a few new dramas and native comedies, all of no meaner calibre than the best seen at the Criterion, or even the Haymarket.

It is true, then, that at the present moment we are in the doldrums, and the reason why is not far to seek. For one thing, there is the overwhelming competition from America. Anything that has reaped American dollars is likely to attract British managers, and our public. It is not a question of quality, it is a question of marketing. The commercial manager understands the gentle art of advertising to perfection, and, with the aid of the Press Agent, there is more talk of a forthcoming American play than of any new work of a native playwright, unless he be Bernard Shaw or Sir James Barrie. When the American piece comes manned by American actors it is often a success through the punch in the acting and in the play. The American system is predatory. It has learnt a great deal from the French, and by the laxity of copyright laws, ideas, scenes, plots are often simply annexed and fathered on someone who is not their creator. Even the most correct of American managers have sometimes indulged in strangely ingenious

practices. No man was whiter in business than the late Charles Frohman, yet I have heard him say that now and again he would buy a French play for the sake of a single scene in order to incorporate it into a new play of American manufacture; and what Charles Frohman did in commercial probity—how many times has it not been done in a less laudable spirit?

When American plays, on the other hand, are acted by our own people—so much less agile, so much less exuberant of temperament, so much less hustled by the producers, who look upon the stage as a baseball ground—the effect is otherwise. We then feel the coarseness of the texture, the baldness of the dialogue, the entire purpose of bamboozling the public by hurry, scurry, and sensation, much after the manner of the man who stands outside a booth in an old-world fair and proclaims the wonders within that on entrance are found to be fakes and charlatanry. Now, our playwrights are less imaginative, perhaps less dexterous, certainly more full of earnestness of purpose, possessed but rarely of the gift to pass off geese as swans. True, we have some who manufacture plays as a cabinet-maker makes cupboards; but the majority of those who work for the stage seek to develop an idea, to express something which they feel they must say, seek to reproduce, to the best of their endeavours, a mirage, if not a mirror, of life. But in their way stands one material factor, and one not to be disregarded: that few among managers will consider any play that on the surface has not money in it, is not either pleasing or daring, and does not end happily. Should an issue logically and dramatically be a query—that is to say, the solution that leaves much to the imagination of the playgoer—the play is taboo, because it forebodes bad bookings. Should a play end in death or undoing, it has also little chance unless the manager is allied to an actor—say, a Henry Ainley, who attempts “*Reparation*,” in spite of the knowledge that his audience will disperse in sadness. For the chief enemy of the theatre is the imbued spirit of the average playgoer that entertainment and compassion are unfit to live in double harness, though there is often far deeper joy in human tragedy than in farce. Laughter alone or a great deal of love is thought a fit solace after the day’s work. Now, this

is a fallacy, aided and abetted by the manager, for whom there is some excuse, since the theatre in England is left to private speculation; and, I say it with some trepidation, by dramatic criticism which in many cases is but handmaiden to the manager, and approaches its high mission without the consciousness of responsibility, and merely reports mainly in praise, instead of holding the scales.

The third and principal factor against the theatre is modern newspaper power, which allots columns to prize-fights and actors, and paragraphs to plays. For all that concerns the actor is considered of greater importance than that which concerns the play and the playwright, unless it be a man or woman of flamboyant personality. In France, to name one country, the drama ranks in the newspapers in importance with politics. It is a factor of national life, so ingrained in all spheres of the nation that I well remember years ago a certain telegram received in Mincing Lane—our centre of the produce trade—addressed to one of the leading firms in the sugar market and worded as follows: "Sugar market is falling and the Comédie Française is on fire." Now, can you imagine any English commercial firm telegraphing to his correspondent in Paris, "Wheat is rising and a bomb has fallen on the Lyceum"? There is the difference of mentality. Our theatre is a plaything. In France and a number of other countries the play is the thing.

Not very long ago I read a report of the municipal Council in a foremost Dutch city, where there was a fierce and yet unended discussion anent the director who was to obtain the lease of that wonderfully equipped town theatre for the next three years. A leading Councillor, a democrat, a workman by profession, got up and said: "I am astounded that there are still people who decline to consider this theatre question seriously, who begrudge the few thousands a year which the Municipality grants from the rates, who still look upon the playhouse as a house of pleasure. In my opinion, the times are past when we took our boys and girls to the theatre as a kind of reward for good behaviour. We should take them to the theatre for the cultivation of their mind in that which is great and beautiful. Talk of higher education! Is not the theatre a greater school than the classroom? Do we not give music

in public places, do we not try to educate the masses by diverting their mind through art from that which is sordid and material?" Thus the democrat! Now, let anyone in England venture to use the word educational, or that other word, elevation, even edification, in connection with the theatre, what is his reward? He is either a dullard or a high-brow. But when musical comedy rattles along—ah, then we hear acclamations of art, and a hyperbolic string of adjectives that would drive a blush into one's cheek if the heavenly gift of a sense of humour were not the natural endowment of the saner part of the population. If Mr. Fisher in his Education Bill had but allotted a tithe of his millions to the Victoria Hall, to the Repertory Theatre in the provincial cities, to the creation of one single theatre in London where not art for art's sake, but art for the people's sake, were writ large over the portals, we should soon cease "killing Kruger with our mouths," for then we should know that our rulers felt one of our crying needs. For there is no glory in being the only country in the Old World where the theatre is the Cinderella of commerce.

CHAPTER II.—March 20th, 1920.

Ethel Irving's "Tosca." Aspirant Playwrights of France.

I AM parsimonious of the word "great," for I know the meaning of its domain, but I do not hesitate to apply it to the Tosca of Ethel Irving as I saw it in Brighton. When in two months' time it comes to London it may be the talk of the town and of our American visitors. Meanwhile, it is illuminating Brighton, Manchester, Liverpool; and well can I understand it that play and actress arouse enthusiasm.

I have seen all the Toscas of our time. I have seen her at the birthday festival when Sarah Bernhardt made one more bid for the conquest of the world. I well remember the magnificent Mrs. Bernard Beere, in some parts not so distant from Sarah, and Lewis Waller as Scarpia. I can recall all these creations in detail, and the main remembrance of them is that they were splendidly theatrical—or, to avoid the flavour of the word, grand virtuosity. And here it is that Ethel Irving surpasses all her predecessors—that I venture to apply to her the word "great."

To Ethel Irving la Tosca is not a heroine of the theatre; she has few of the grand *allures* of the star whose voice ensnared kings and peoples. To her she is a woman in love. Nothing more, but all that in its universality of feeling. When she enters with lilies in her arms, she strikes no pose. She is simply a woman of quality speeding to embrace, and the pastoral hour. When she discovers the fan, she casts all dignity to the winds. She is merely a woman rent and torn in the throes of jealousy. When she discovers her error, she is the submissive woman who in humility and caress seeks forgiveness.

But when her lover in the adjacent cabinet is tortured in the horrible adornment of a spiked crown, she rises to greatness. Her agony, expressed in anguished reflex on her countenance of the atrocity in the other room, is terribly real; her sinless betrayal of the fugitive is terribly afflicting. She does not spare herself. She gives all her power, her nerve force, her heart. The audience is spellbound, and remains so in that wonderful scene of suspense when Scarpia pays with his life for his fiendishness; and his slayer, a woman to a fault, crosses his hands, lays a crucifix on his breast, and places candles of holiness by his temples.

It is this unending femininity of Miss Irving's Tosca which constitutes its supremacy. After that, the actress should not fear to attack the tragedy of the Greeks. The heroines of the past are within her reach. And the young-old play inspired all around her—the Caravadossi of Vincent Clive, more and more interesting as the play proceeded; the Angelotti of Henry Ludlow; above all, the Scarpia of Jerrold Robertshaw. At length he has found the part that reveals the fulness of his gift. It requires distinction, *finesse*, persuasiveness, Iago-ism, rhetorical power, sustained intensity. Mr. Robertshaw displayed all that. His Scarpia was a foil to the immortal Scarpia who created the part, Pierre Berton. Could one say more, and is it not a well-deserved tribute when paid without exaggeration?

Thus "La Tosca," without need to fear her twin-sister, the opera, will once more revive the fame of Sardou and add laurels to the chief interpreters.

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I wonder what the Parisian world and the world at large where the Drama is a matter of vital interest will think of the latest temptation of that renowned St. Anthony—André Antoine, the founder of the Théâtre Libre, who has once more gone forth into the sun in boldness of new strategy. The Théâtre Libre was the fountain-head of the new dramatic current of France which began with Brieux and Ancy, and, *via* Maurice Donnay and Rosny, reached its highest and finest pressure in the work of François de Curel, of whom, so far, but one play, "The New Idol," has been seen in England, thanks to the Stage Society. The Théâtre Libre led Antoine to the coveted post of the Second Theatre of the State, the Odéon. But the Odéon by its very nature is adverse to the intimate subtle art of André Antoine. It is a big, unwieldy barrack, which has for years been a sink of hope and fortune. Nor did Antoine do very well there. He attempted much, he achieved something, but he had to give up much. He felt like a fish out of water.

Then came the struggle, and Antoine reverted to an occupation for which he was eminently fitted—dramatic criticism. With a style

all his own, with the world's drama in his grasp and at his fingers' ends, with a mind outwardly coldly analytical, inwardly seething with emotion, his judgments of plays became *dicta*. He was not flamboyant in the ordinary sense of the word ; he was flaming with knowledge and penetration. Once bitten never shy, his heart's desire was not to preach but to practise ; in preference, both. And so it came to pass that when Pierre Wolff—another godchild of Antoine who made a brilliant début at the Théâtre Libre with "Leurs Filles," and has since given us a momentous series of which "Les Marionnettes" is the best known in England—when Pierre Wolff obtained a lease of the Vaudeville Theatre he at once bethought himself of his spiritual creator, and decided that in the wake of the Théâtre Libre the Vaudeville should become the Cape of Good Hope of the aspirant playwright in France.

Not that Pierre Wolff intends to abandon the necessary run of plays in the evening, but he is alive to the fact, which lately is also awakening some managers in London, that theatres waste much time in emptiness, and that such time could be made useful and profitable for the benefit of the rising generation ; and so he went to Antoine and said, "Here is my theatre. Let us form a committee of playwrights, actors, critics—let us open our doors wide to all, make selection, and produce." Then Antoine, embracing the scheme with enthusiasm, said, "I am with you. I will help you to select, but I will do more. I will produce each year a certain number of plays for you, and I will go further : in order to give a stimulus to the authors whom we cannot produce, but whose ideas, however imperfectly expressed, deserve recording, I will throw open the columns of my paper, *L'Information*, and there relate tersely plot, features, and the qualities of promising plays." What he exactly meant by that remains to be seen.

As yet the whole scheme is in embryo, and, leaving alone the question of newspaper synopses, which seems debatable, is the combination of Antoine-Wolff not one that commends itself to our leaders of the theatre ? Suppose Reandean, of whom by force of capital and the experience of Mr. Basil Deane much may be expected, were to surrender one of their theatres entirely to the new generation, would not that be the

first channel towards clearance of the sluggish waters of our dramatic production? At present the aspirant playwright has but three help-mates—his own resources; two or three *théâtres à côté*, such as the Pioneers, Stage Society, and the Independent; and two or three Repertory Theatres in the provinces, which, in order to live, have to feed to a great extent on London successes. What does this outlet signify in a World Empire? Is it not time that we should wake up and cease to let sleeping dogs lie?

CHAPTER III.—March 27th, 1920.

Russian Ballet. The Fallacy of First Nights.

ONCE again "Russian Ballet" is on many lips; Sir James Barrie has endeavoured to analyse its "soul" in the most extraordinary sketch ever seen in a music-hall; anon the Pavlova will drive London's throng towards Drury Lane to a feast of art which has cast opera into the shade. Whence this rare spell over classes and masses; whence this chorus of enthusiasm, this ceaseless devotion of the many who would forgo a "meal to pay for an evening's joy"? In old days it was a case of hero-worship. One went to see a *prima ballerina*, a Taglioni, a Fanny Ellsler, and took the *corps de ballet* into the bargain as a kind of necessary evil.

To-day the *prima ballerina* is still the figurehead, but she has become a constitutional potentate—she rules but she does not govern. She is a unit in a scheme. According to Barrie, if I read him correctly, the difference between the old ballet and the Russian one is that the former was one man's drill and the latter one man's creation. In other words, Academic ballet was a formula; Russian ballet is an inspiration, the inspiration of uniting music, motion, dancing, colour, and line into one perfect artistic harmony, and interweaving it with a *Leitmotif*, a symbol, a story. There was, as it were, a massed frontal attack on imagination, senses, and intelligence. The artistically inclined understood it to the full, and savoured the unison of the whole; mere pleasure-seekers were fascinatingly puzzled by something which they could not wholly explain—for Stravinski and Bakst are not accessible at once—but which they found strangely beautiful, and by the wonderful grace of the dancers, winged from head to foot, they were carried away to that far-away fairyland which unconsciously hovers over the mind of all human beings. Thus the Russian Ballet has become naturalised as an institution.

Once upon a time a London first night was a festival. Now it has become an orgy—an orgy of indiscriminate applause which deludes both those who proffer it and those who receive it.

Once upon a time there was an Areopagus on a first night—or rather, there were two ; one in the stalls and dress-circle, composed of the critics whose duty it was to judge ; and one in pit and gallery of other critics whose labour of love it was to judge. The critics in pit and gallery ever tempered justice with mercy, yet there were occasions when they spoke out freely—never during the performance, for an English audience is too urbane to give a verdict until the evidence is concluded—but at the end there were manifestations which unmistakably indicated the feelings of the hearer as well as the possibilities of the career of the play. When the reception was enthusiastic, it meant either a long career, or it meant that the judges in pit and gallery heartily approved of an effort in the right direction, without tempting the manager into the belief that he had a box-office winner.

Ibsen's plays always had a favourable first-night verdict, except on the first night of " Ghosts," in 1891, when there was a battle royal between moralists and progressists, ending in the defeat of the former, despite what Clement Scott and others said, crystallised in the words of Joseph Knight of the *Globe* : " This play is as good as a sermon," a fact which was proved during the war. Every play by Oscar Wilde had a mixed reception, because there were elements below and aloft which were considered unwelcome by *habitués* who, not always fairly, vented their feelings towards the man on his work. But Ibsen and Wilde stood on a plane of their own as far as the prospects of a first night were concerned. All plays that held the audience, fascinated them, and were not considered inane or cheap-jack work by authors whom pit and gallery knew capable of doing better, were received with applause so finely graduated that every connoisseur knew whether it meant a success of esteem or a real success. When a play failed to interest them, was really bad, or unworthy of the playwright, there were now and again ugly sounds on the appearance of the author, and not infrequently palavers between audience and the manager, the latter of whom did not, as he does nowadays, appraise and praise his own production before the critics. So, on the whole, there was a healthy tone at the first night and meaning in the verdict. That is all over now. The stalls and the dress circle

have remained much what they were before—invited guests, ready to applaud, full of praise mainly for the actors, and reserving their real thoughts until they are outside. Hence flowers and jubilation have taken the place of the reserve and quiet disapproval which was in former days sometimes the forerunner of a very short life. But it is in the pit and gallery that the great change has taken place. They have lost their character, not as individuals, but as an entity. An adverse verdict is an unknown quantity. The play has ceased to be the main factor. The actor has usurped its place. The cult has become one of the individual instead of the cause ; so much so that actors are applauded in the theatre not only because they act, but because they happen to enter the auditorium as mere visitors.

This general want of discrimination raises the point whether the fashion of convening critics on the first night is conducive to fair judgment. From the manager's point of view, it undoubtedly is ; for he knows full well that in the critic always lurks the human being, and that where human beings are foregathered the influence of massed magnetism is undeniable. But from the critic's point of view, unless he be adamant to the peril of being unwittingly infected by the constant fluid of approval around him, his sense of valuation is weakened. This is so true that some of us, during the war time, when at the beginning the life of the theatre was seriously threatened and we were exhorted to be lenient, found our standard gradually leaning towards too much indulgence and too little severity. I shall be the last to advocate austere methods so long as the theatre is maintained by private enterprise only, and so long as we must consider that not only money, but the living wage of many is involved in the fate of the play. Nor would I advocate the abolition of first-night criticism, since what happens in the theatre belongs to the news of the day. But I do believe that, for the sake of the critic as well as for the sake of the playhouse, it would not be a bad plan to adopt the French method, which records the general aspect of the evening and reception in a short report, and allows the critic a weekly *feuilleton* wherein he can expound his views fully, and after due consideration. In other words, let the critics be convened, as has been done

sometimes in London, to a dress rehearsal, and let the description of the first night be entrusted to those charming lady reporters who so often in our dailies flatly contradict in one column what the critic has said in another. For, after all, let us be candid: the first night is no more nowadays than a private view at the Academy, where one goes mainly to be seen, not to see. Whereas the art critics select the quiet days when nobody is about but artists and brethren of the craft, whose attention is undeflected by outward demonstrations and that ready-made enthusiasm which does more harm than rooted prejudice.

CHAPTER IV.—April 3rd, 1920.

The National Theatre again. Louis Bouwmeester.

THE answer which our excellent Minister of Education has given to a deputation of the Drama League proves that he underestimates the theatre as a national institution. Urged to help in the establishment of a National Theatre policy, he suggests that the Government would favour a scheme of municipal support. Incidentally, he added: "Now that English literature is being seriously studied in the Universities we may, I think, hope for some very promising results," Anent this I would say with the American: "I should smile." It is the finest sample of official retort on record. It uses a commonplace to express nothing.

But to come to the main point. Is it fair, is it real appreciation of the intellectual needs of the nation, to delegate to townships the duty of the State? Is the ratepayer, already over-burdened, to be charged once more for that which could easily be spared from the millions of Mr. Fisher's educational budget? I could well follow the Minister if he proposed that every municipality should erect, *pari passu* with town-halls and schools, well-equipped theatres, and let them to competent managers at a reasonable rental. That would be an encouragement of art, and good finance. For charging but half—in some cases a third—of what is nowadays paid for a theatre in London and the greater centres, the return in interest would be well worth while the capitalisation. It is done in Belgium, in Holland, in Germany, and the ratepayers are well pleased with the system.

But between the building and the equipment of a theatre and the idea of the Drama League (and others) there is a vast difference. It would be folly to expect successful theatre-management in the artistic sense from our municipal bodies. Without wishing to belittle their intelligence, I contend that there is no proof whatsoever that they are manned by persons who have the right understanding of drama and acting as arts. The first aid must come from the State, and, so long as we have no Ministry of Fine Arts—which is much needed—from the

Minister of Education. For even private initiation has failed: look at the serio-comic story of the National Theatre movement which began with Sir Carl Meyer's munificence, and has met with no single large response from an English Mæcenas. Yet look what the State could achieve with one million detached from the huge sum Minister Fisher wants for education!

The building question is of minor import; it is not the bricks and mortar that matter, but the inner life of the building. And there are at least two theatres in London—the Haymarket and His Majesty's—which, with befitting compensation and a patriotic appeal to their owners, would be ideal for the purposes of the National Theatre. If Sir Alfred Butt and Mr. Collins could not be prevailed upon, let Drury Lane be indeed what it is in name.

The building question solved, the interest would amply suffice to organise the institution; to equip all the plays of Shakespeare once and for all, so that revival would not each time mean new outlay of production; to maintain a *répertoire* from our old literature and our modern plays; to encourage the newcomer; to revive the classics of the ancients and of India; to produce the best and most universal work of Europe—most of which is unknown to us, or left to spasmodic performances of private societies. To handle the scheme no hydra-headed committee is needed.

The example of Reinhardt should be our finger-point. He stands alone and commands, yet he is surrounded by an excellent staff—in the military, not in the lesser, sense of the word—men who are his peers in experience, men who have the world's drama at their finger-ends, men who command languages, men who do not theorise about the drama, but who know the four corners of the stage from the curtain-bell to the electric-light board. With these men he confers in ministerial conclave; his spirit dominates; his word is law; but he distils—the master-mind he is—from their reports and considerations all he needs to supplement his own projects.

What Berlin has found in a Galician, London can find too, not necessarily among the established managers, but among the younger generation, some of whom have studied in all the great centres of the

Old World and the New, and are thirsting to burst forth with deeds. So let us pray that by constantly hammering at Minister Fisher's door we may convince him that the National Theatre need not be laboriously and incompetently bred by municipality and rates, but that it is merely a question of finding a tub of gold and a Diogenes inside.

Louis Bouwmeester, whose Shylock for one brief week added lustre to Mr. J. B. Fagan's season at the Duke of York's Theatre, might well be called the Henry Irving of the Netherlands. For, like Irving, he is looked upon as the Grand Old Man of his profession. He stands above party-strife—the battle royal for supremacy of the younger generation, in which one half of the nation sides with Willem Royaards, anon the proud conqueror of the Amsterdam National Theatre, and the other is divided between Eduard Verkade, Jan Musch, and Van der Lugt.

"Onze Louis" is one of the institutions of his country; he is the idol of the people; his creations of the great figures of literature are part and parcel of juvenile education. Every man, woman, and child has seen his Shylock, his Louis XI., his Wolsey, his *Œdipus*, his Napoleon (in "*Madame Sans-Gêne*"), his Mark Antony, and, until some years ago, his Hamlet. There may be difference of opinion as to some of his conceptions, but his work possesses the power of impressing itself indelibly on the memory. As I write, I see the pageant filing past me in distinct differentiation; I remember details of poignant scenes; I hear the echo of his deep, wondrous voice, which propels every word in rare purity of coinage. For Bouwmeester's diction is the greatest of his gifts. Bouwmeester is an actor by intuition—the actor born, in contrast to the actor made by learning. Some people say that his scholarly knowledge is scant—and, indeed, he is a poor penman: his letters are of archaic simplicity—but he is, by dowry of genius, something greater than a scholar. He sees things steadily and whole, and, without toying with details, he reveals an astounding grasp of character.

We discussed Shylock the other day: he had just arrived after a laborious journey, and sat in his hotel quietly smoking his pipe—a little Napoleon to the life, looking not a day older than his double in his fiftieth

year. We were comparing notes concerning the greatest Shylocks of a generation: Irving, Possart, and—despite his modest negation—Bouwmeester. Then he burst forth, and in Dutch, almost Shakespearean in choice of language, he gave his view. His eye aflame, his outcry torrential, his oblivion of self turned the little hotel bedroom into a stage. His argument crystallised in a Hymn of Hate—the Jew's hatred of the Gentiles. That was, according to him, the all-conquering characteristic of the man. His race down-trodden, he would avenge his race. And as such he has shown us the Jew—Jew to the backbone in lisp, in profusion of gesture, in love of possession, in paternal pride and attachment—but, above all, Jew in the unwritten, self-imposed mission to pay back with compound interest centuries of humiliation. It was this adamant conception that held us spellbound in the theatre, that made us forget the difference of language. As in opera, the melody translated the word.

But what we did not forget, and what should be recorded in proud admiration, is that, with but one rehearsal, our actors harmonised so completely with their guest that the picture showed neither crack nor blur.

CHAPTER V.—April 10th, 1920.

The Passage of Princes—and Stars (Hortense Schneider—Jane Hading).

A FEW days ago there was much bustle and interest at the famous Salle Drouot—the auction rooms of Paris. There were marbles and pictures, Gobelins and cabinets Louis XV., costly toilet-appliances in chased gold, trinkets and precious stones—in fine, the thousand and one lovely things belonging to the retinue of a woman of quality. And in the midst of this little feminine Eldorado there wandered unbeknown to one another, but keenly observed by the journalistic eye, two women. One, a queen, erect, with magnificent brown eyes under a helmet of chestnut hair filmed here and there with silver; the other a vivacious old lady, slightly bent, seemingly *petite*, strangely agile, cosying with busy fingers many of the pretty things that fascinated her.

And the journalist said to his friend: "Do you know the twain? Two of the geniuses of France, although the one has not been seen for more than fifty years, and the other, silent since the war, is wiping the dust of Paris off her feet to end her days in the land of sunshine, down by the Mediterranean, whence she came. Can you guess their names?" The other remained silent; he thought and thought, he paraded through his mind all the great actresses of modern France, but he never guessed right! Once again the poet triumphed in his saying, "Posterity twines no wreath for the mummer"—off the boards, soon forgotten! Yet when he heard the two names he blushed; for the one made history, and the other was the third great figure in the triumvirate (if so it may be called) that ruled the French stage from the second Empire to close upon our day: Sarah Bernhardt, Réjane, and—Jane Hading.

The one who made history was Hortense Schneider, better known universally by her famous part as the Grand Duchess of Gerolstein—she who was the joy of the Great Exhibition of 1867; who was the friend of kings and princes; who was the idol of the people; who inspired the lyre, the brush, and the chisel; who drove to the Grand Palais and ordered the portals of the royal entry to be opened for her as the equal of sovereigns—the Grande Duchesse de Gerolstein; whose carriage was

rarely horse-driven, for the crowd harnessed themselves to it ; whose audacious *bons mots* ran like wildfire over Europe ; who shone like a sun over the Ville Lumière ; whose name was on all lips until the dark days of the 'seventies fell on France and relegated the Second Empire and all its lustre to limbo. For nearly half a century she has only lived in books and memories ; the world thought her long since under the willows of Père Lachaise.

Yet Hortense Schneider is very much alive, and far from bemoaning the days of glory that were ; she lives and enjoys her Paris—" *mon Paris !* "—as if it were still her little kingdom, and when she was asked whether she regretted, she answered : " Regret ? How can one regret the past when one lives in the present, and when one watches the old country grown greater than ever, and the young generation doing the same thing a hundred times better than one did it oneself ? There is no old age when the mind remains young ; there is no past when every day brings new life. They still sing : '*La jeunesse n'a qu'un temps,*' and so do I ; but then I look out of the window at the spring and not at my mirror. *Voilà,*" said she, once more quoting the immortal Duchesse, " that's what you may say of me in the *Gazette de Hollande.*"

But Jane Hading, still young, still beautiful, still conscious of what she might achieve if things were different, piped another melody. Blowing little rings from her eternal cigarette, she sighed for the former days when the Comédie Française was the hub of the artistic universe, when acting was art, and, according to her, the public understood the meaning of talent. " That is all over and done now. The public likes everything, consequently it likes nothing in particular, except the cinema—oh ! the cinema, that is the great enemy of the theatre. It has cast a shroud over the playhouse. I have tried it : I had to succumb to it at the instance of Georges Ohnet, who made me by his '*Maître de Forges,*' but what I suffered was indescribable." And she inveighed against the mechanical in art and the decadence of the theatre.

And so Jane Hading, unless her farewell be a caprice so peculiar to actors—for, once bitten never shy—goes to her native heath of Marseilles to plant flowers and vegetables. She is perhaps not a disappointed woman, but she is a satiated one. From queen of *opérette*

for whom Lecocq and Offenbach wrote "La Jolie Persane" and "Lurette," she graduated to comedy. She married Koning of the Gymnase, and he made her famous. "The Iron Master" (in which our own unforgettable Mrs. Kendal gathered the laurels and tears of the nation) revealed uncommon acting qualities. She was cold but inspiring, and strangely beautiful. Sarcey predicted a great future for her when all the world, while rushing to the theatre to see her, refused to acknowledge her as the equal of Réjane or Sarah. But she was made of the sterling stuff that characterises the Provençale. She would and she should win! She would travel all over the world and bring back to France the homage of millions. "Les Demi Vierges" of Prévost, "Le Prince Zilah" of Claretie, the "Idylle Tragique" of Bourget, widened her horizon.

The great writers of France were all for her and with her, and with Daudet's "Sapho" came revelation, with Bisson's "La Femme X," greatness. "Sapho," that wonderful picture of the courtesan struggling for redemption by love, convinced the Parisians that this great, cold beauty was nothing less than a seething cauldron within. It was a flamboyant performance, if ever there was one; it roused enthusiasm as well as boundless pity. Then came "La Femme X" (Miss Ashwell has done it splendidly in English), and in the third act of the court scene—an act in which the accused heroine in the dock has but one word to utter, there radiated from Jane Hading's silent agony a tragic force greater than the power of words. A grief-stricken, anguished countenance of a majestic woman broken, like a column struck by lightning, told a tale of woe so sincere, so harrowing, so pitiful, that the melodramatic story became as heartbreaking as cruel reality. After "La Femme X" the world was unanimous and expectant.

Jane Hading had conquered: henceforth tragedy was her domain open to receive her. But Jane Hading, like so many women of France when the typhoon of 1914 overwhelmed her country, forsook the stage for greater work, and when peace came she found that the order of things had changed. Perhaps in the clear skies of Provence she will see a different vista and gladden the artistic world by the tidings that her "Adieu" meant merely "Au Revoir."

CHAPTER VI.—April 17th, 1920.

"R.A.D.A." Advance, Hampstead!

ONCE a year it becomes manifest that yonder in Gower Street, where in modest housing flourishes Sir Herbert Tree's foundation, the Academy of Dramatic Art, good work is done for the stage. Under Mr. Kenneth Barnes's able direction, fortified by the active assistance of some of the leaders of the dramatic profession, young material is carefully prepared for its coming career. Experienced actors produce the plays, teachers in elocution foster voice and pronunciation, Louis D'Egville teaches dancing, and latterly Miss Enid Rose initiates the student in the delicate art of eloquence in gesture—the Delsarte method, which is at length acknowledged as one of the most effective helpmates in the formation of budding actors. For all too often our actors when they have nothing to say remain listless listeners, forgetful of the fact that expressive silence fills the picture, intensifies the words of the speaker. Coquelin, who was the greatest of teachers, often used to say, "Don't forget, my children, that when you have nothing to say you are still acting, for the effect on the audience is dependent on the impression conveyed by you"—golden words indeed, which every actor should remember.

Now, the main feature of the recent public performance of the students at the St. James's Theatre was their better understanding of modern work than of Shakespeare. For, truth to tell, the scene from "Twelfth Night" was monotonous to the degree of dullness. It was not so much a question of diction as of penetration. The young actors seemed petrified by the rhythm; it stifled their movements and their sense of humour; they would, like Malvolio, try to be formal, and became stiff; they tried, like the Clown, to be jocular, and they grew merely facetious. By way of contrast, in "The Amazons" of our Master Pinero (who, I feel confident, will not take it amiss if I say that the play dates), the students were heart and soul in the game. Of course, one or two were too young for their parts—a blessed fault which time will remedy—but all let themselves go, and in Jane Amstel the judges rightly

discovered a new actress of talent who by temperament and personality promises well. She earned the medal, and well was it bestowed.

In the French play, "Dead-Heat," the judges went a little astray. They should have medalled the one whose pronunciation was the least Britannic—Miss Dorothy Bayliss. With closed eyes one could have imagined that she was French, so well did she master the accent. But they elected to choose another young artist—probably because she was more French in gesture and appearance. Wherefore the question arises: Why is the French play given? To prove that English students can transform themselves into French characters, or that they speak the foreign language well? As it is, the French part of the programme is a *tour de force*, and as such a credit to the teacher, Mlle. Gachet.

After charming dances, notably a "Coon quartette" of great nimbleness and humour, came Maeterlinck's "Interior." In this the main part is acted in silence, and the chorus is played in front of the room where sadness comes to overwhelm domestic happiness. Here a mistake was made. The old man and the stranger who foreshadow the approaching tragedy were interpreted by girls, and neither of them conveyed age or mystery. On the other hand, the Delsartian silence spoke volumes. Real was the happiness of the interior, real their grief: here was the difference between film and live actors. There was no excess of motion, no propelling of incidents, no artifice whatsoever. One could have called it a "still-life" in animation, so measured, so feeling, so everyday-like it was.

The programme concluded with a new sketch by Miss Jennings, an artificial little play well performed, and on the whole we came away with admiration for the work of the Academy. For it must be remembered that as yet the students have to rehearse merely in a cramped little stage of a converted drawing-room, which means great individual effort when they act on a large stage like the St. James's. There is a charming theatre attached to Gower Street. But it is still unfinished and unequipped, for want of funds. Here there is a great chance for a lover of the stage to lend a liberal hand. A theatre—a real theatre of their

own—would be a godsend to the students, and for their teachers it would mean half the battle. For the sense of proportion—one of the most important qualifications of the actor—can only be cultivated on a stage where there is room for gesture and free circulation.

A bracing north-western breeze from Hampstead Garden Suburb quickens the sluggish pulse of theatrical London. There are enthusiasts in Hampstead, and they mean business, with small means, great ideas, and, apparently, the support of well-known playwrights. They do not affect sham modesty, except in means and ways. So far, £80 has been collected, and for but thirty pieces of silver per annum you are entitled to enjoy all the revels. Nor will they be selfish, as one of the energetic promoters, Mr. S. W. Bishop, writes: "Our object is not only to do things ourselves, but to give opportunities for other societies to get an audience. The Arts League of Service are opening their new tour up here with a first performance, and we are accepting all financial responsibility." So here are two combinations that will, at any rate as far as the actors are concerned, bring new talent to light; and the first programme—Yeats, Brighouse, Lady Gregory, and a ballet by Margaret Morris—indicates both catholicity of taste as well as discrimination. Anon will follow work of more ambitious compass, from Shakespeare to Chesterton, from Musset to Rostand and Stevenson, from Schnitzler to Benrimo.

But that is not all. Hampstead has its Heath, and no finer open-air theatre can be imagined than this summit of London. Here the fine art of pageantry, awakened from its war slumbers, will flourish in foliage, azure, and clouds; and the first pageant will be one by Cyril Kelsey and Percy Meadows, whose work, if I remember well, was the winner in the competition judged by Granville Barker. Now, pageants mean people and costumes. There is no dearth of the former—rely on Hampstead's allegiance and time-honoured ambition (does it not boast of a splendid Conservatoire all its own?). But costumes are a matter of economic importance—indeed, I can speak by the card, costumes and scenery are the rock on which splits so much individual ambition. The Hampsteaders have solved that knotty problem. For scenery they have

the aid of nature ; and, indoors, curtains will satisfy all their requirements. But the costumes, with the help of feminine enthusiasts, they will make themselves, and they appeal to all who can swing the needle to lend a helping hand. Next year there will be an All-Hampstead Pageant—a competition in which no one but denizens of the borough may cooperate. With such promises, with achievement in sight, with a prosperous community welcoming their effort, "The Play and Pageant Union" may well live up to its motto: "We would rather do a good thing moderately than a poor thing excellently." That is the kind of "Excelsior" which stimulates, and I enjoin my readers to write to the Secretary, Mrs. Bishop, 27, Asmonds Hill, N.W., for the dainty first number of the *Play and Pageant News*, which contains the full plan of an explicit campaign of progress.

CHAPTER VII.—April 24th, 1920.

London—and other Theatrical Centres of the World.

IT is a strange thing that London is the only great capital of the world, except Paris, where foreign theatres fight for existence without rooting solidly in the soil. The exception of Paris needs no comment. The French still claim that theirs is the theatre of the world. They cannot cope with the production of their playwrights—playwriting is the dream of every schoolboy. They have nothing to learn from foreign actors, although now and again the appearance of an English play in French might render that axiom debatable. Their language, in spite of keen English competition in the commercial and practical side of life, is still the one language fit to interpret the thoughts of men and gods. The French are content in their possession and in the conviction that in imagination, in versatility, in form and expression their theatre embraces the whole of the art. The foreigner is received with respectful tolerance, but he is not made to feel at home! Ibsen will anon, after years of idle knocking at the door, be admitted to the Comédie Française as an act of grace towards the League of Nations, it may be assumed, not by the desire to widen the horizon of that great establishment. François de Curel and his kinsmen have long since outwinged the great Scandinavian.

Now, London is quite a different soil. We do not say it openly—at least not often—but we feel it clearly that our theatre does not come up to our ideals: that it cannot live on the native output, or that it does not inspire sufficient confidence for continuous “experiment”; that, with few exceptions, our playwrights have much to learn, and that foreign influence is eagerly adopted without admission. Moreover London’s cosmopolitanism is, like New York’s, different from that of all other great cities. One may not believe it, yet it remains a fact that the foreigner who settles here generally remains a foreigner, albeit that he uses broken English in public. In their homes these Belgians, Italians, French, Germans, Russians in our midst remain birds of passage in London life. They speak their own language in intimacy, they live after the manners of their countries, they crave for amusement accessible

to their mentality. Hence there is a constant demand for, and a sporadic attempt at, the establishment of foreign theatres in London. The Russians have had theirs in Yiddish: the Italians, *faute de mieux*, play Italian plays in clubs; the Germans in the pre-war times had for some years a German Theatre of real quality; for the French there have been in rotation the Little French Theatre, the Belgian plays at the Criterion, the Théâtre des Alliés, the French Players, and in the Nineties—until Mr. L. Mayer, that patriotic impresario, grew tired of losing money—the regular French Theatre at the Royalty.

Granted that there are perhaps not enough patrons for a regular permanent Italian and Russian theatre in the West End, that the chance of the German Theatre is gone, there remains a vast population to keep a French Theatre alive; for at least all the Latin Races understand French, also the Dutch and Scandinavian, and as soon as there is an announcement of French plays there is a great deal of interest among those who hear of it. For the crux of the question lies here. London is practically not one city like Paris or Berlin, or even New York; London is an agglomeration with poles wide apart. Wonderful work is done in many directions in London West or London East, of which London South and London North know literally nothing. Nor is there one paper in London to which all London looks for its news. According to political colour or personal taste the members of a family read different newspapers, and these newspapers do not linger at home. They go their own ways, mostly in the pockets of the breadwinners on the journey to work. Unless you advertise in all of them—which means a fortune—your doings may remain a myth. As the other day a well-known Society person—it seems the right description—said on being asked to join the French Players: "French Players! Never heard of them; I thought there had been no French plays since Réjane was here in '14."

Such things tell. It is not easy to get at the Hinterland of London. Nor does that London seek to know what is going on. You must point it out to them with a barge-pole. Not long ago a London manager who had two successes—one at matinées, the other at night—thought that to maintain them he had better now and again change their places,

which he advertised *urbi et orbi*. The result was disastrous. The people who went to see the matinée play were disappointed, and *vice-versa*; there was endless confusion, exchange of tickets, and return of money. In the end both plays "ceased to attract," not because their success was exhausted, but because the public, apparently, had grown tired of solving conundrums. In other great capitals it is not the theatre that runs after the people, it is the people who run after the theatre. (If our people run at all it is after the actors.) Paris is well strewn with advertisement columns, at which many people who saunter along stop to study the *affiches* from top to bottom. London has latterly displayed on all stations that wonderful list of amusements published by Mr. David for the Managers' Association. Now, I am much interested in that list, and I always try to observe how many people waiting for trains peruse it. It is certain that, for one who does so, ten others look at a pictorial poster.

The upshot of it all is that the want of a foreign, I should specify a French, theatre is a case of "not proven." We have not had one effort sufficiently supported to placard the walls of Greater London and thereby attract the willing spirits, yet the full houses at single performances betoken that the energy is not wasted "if we but knew." As I write I learn that soon the great Guitry and his son, France's wittiest playwright, are coming to the Aldwych Theatre, thanks to the hospitality of Miss Viola Tree in fulfilment of her father's last recommendation. Perhaps that visit, which is sure to draw all London, will turn to fertility years of spade-work. Perhaps the impression will be so lasting that at length a manager will stake the few thousands that are needed to endow London with a permanent Théâtre Français. It would seem to be no gamble, not even a speculation, but merely to betoken understanding of the march of the times.

CHAPTER VIII.—May 1st, 1920.

The Theatre of the Great Unacted. Leonard Boyne.

IF it is not a hoax—and I doubt it, for a great Paris paper has published the news in a very serious manner—the Millennium is coming for the aspirant playwright. “Why should not every play that is written have a chance?” said a ‘cute Parisian young man of letters; and he gave out that he had found a nice little theatre in Montmartre—they easily construct them there in warehouses, basements, and cellars—which he intended to consecrate to the Cause of the Great Unacted. “Send in your plays,” said he, “and they will be acted whether they be good, bad, or indifferent. You never can tell what rare treasures may be hidden in your desk.” The Theatre of the Unacted would be worked on lines of co-operation. Everybody who wished to make a bid for immortality would be expected to bear a share in the expenses; all the sums paid in would be pooled, and if luck had it that a real winner—that is, a play accepted, after production, by a regular theatre—should arise, then the contributors would share in the profits. *Prima facie*, it seems a mad scheme; for, granted that there is a public for all manner of quaint experiments—to say nothing of fond relations and friends of the author—can it be expected that the critics will pay attention to the performances on the off-chance of finding grain among the chaff? Yet there are possibilities. I remember a certain play which, after having been rejected by many managers, and put on by a mere fluke after a failure—because there was nothing else handy—came, saw, and conquered. I remember the early struggles of Sardou, who wrote thirty plays before one was produced—and was, I think a failure—yet who hammered away until he had one more chance, achieved success, and henceforth could easily liquidate his stock. There are many other authors who played the weary waiting game for years—there is one now in London who confesses to some fifty “duds”—from farce to tragedy, from a problem to a political play. Lastly, it is on record that more than thirty years ago someone in the then flourishing *Dramatic Review* proposed the establishment of a Trial Theatre—not quite so drastic

as the Paris scheme—that it came into being in a sense, and would have gone on but for the want of a little cash.

There is some method in the Parisian madness, albeit in theory only, and I think that the underlying idea is a two-fold one. First, that some means should be found to ascertain the merits of plays the very fewest of which attain so much as a mere reading. Second, that until a play is tested in some plastic way, no one can with any certainty foretell how it will act. Nor would I advocate that we should follow the Parisian example, which merely presents itself as a curiosity. But we might with some hope of success encourage the practice of the Liverpool Playgoers' Society, which often has plays read in public by members who have studied the parts under competent guidance—a method that very fairly conveys the next best impression to stage representation.

Leonard Boyne, who died recently, was one of my earliest acquaintances on the London stage. He was playing at the time at the Vaudeville in Robert Buchanan's "Sophia," an adaptation from Fielding, and all London was talking of the beautiful Miss Kate Rorke and that "wild, fascinating young Irishman"—Leonard Boyne. To me he was a revelation: such fire, such power of diction, such force now and again overlapping into vehemence—where was the like of it on the English stage of that day? True, we had the brilliant William Terriss, but his talent was of a different fibre: with Boyne it seemed all to come from the furnace, with Terriss from the forge. Boyne was erratic. There were days when he concealed part of his words between pursed lips, or would propel them as from a pop-gun. But he was always spontaneous: acting with him was not an acquired thing; it was innate, and sprang from him simply because it was there and must out. His range was wide, but his style harmonised both with romance and melodrama; and it is a quaint experience that, whereas he was very popular and in great demand as a juvenile, there came a period when his light was, as it were, under a bushel. For he was often on tour, and perhaps he was not one of those who carry secondary parts into prominence. Of his work in the earliest part of this century, Belsize in "The Marriage

of Kitty" is perhaps best remembered. His Irish descent stood him in good stead here, for he displayed all the wit of a real comedian entwined with the tact of the diplomatist who understands how to glide over thin ice. Then, as they say in plays, years passed, and the next real bid for fame was in George Birmingham's delightful comedy, "General John Regan." The part of the Innkeeper might have been written for him; it became very nearly the central figure, for in it Boyne, sportsman as he was in his heart, found all he desired—he had but to be himself. And when Boyne felt a part he carried all before him. His grand finale—I fear it was also his grand exit—was in Maugham's "Caroline," in which he played the elderly Irish baronet who very nearly made a fool of himself over the charming lady, and in a delicious scene saw his peril and his audacity. When one sees hundreds of plays, scenes become vaguely misty in memory, but very distinctly I see Boyne's engaging personality—his faultless attire, his exquisite manner, his suavity of address, his bashful smile which told so much in confusion and apology, and, at the crux of the episode, his gentle pathos, so unobtrusive, so genuine, that it moved us more deeply than many an impassioned scene. It was in characters of intermingled humour and pathos that Leonard Boyne excelled and held his audience. For even in his mannerisms there was the undercurrent of distinction which indicates the uncommon mind.

CHAPTER IX.—May 8th, 1920.

Old Lamps for New. "The Skin Game."

ONE of the most remarkable developments of the modern theatre is the progress in the economy of scenery. Some years ago one looked askance at Elizabethan methods. Now they are gaining ground swiftly. The tendency is not to reduce scenery to scantiness, but to render it subservient to imagination. Formerly it was the detail that mattered, now it is the totality of impression. The back-cloth in one tone is ousting the minute picture. Drapery, in its manifold arrangements, indicates palaces as well as chambers, cathedrals as well as warrior's camps. Accessories are being reduced to a necessary minimum. In other words, instead of being spoon-fed, the public is being taught to exercise its sense of the imaginative.

It is a healthy reaction, for it exalts the living figures beyond the canvas. It impels the ear to be on the alert and enfranchises the vision from deflecting its attention from the player. In thus placing the actor in relief, it exacts greater power of diction on his part. In our traditional gorgeous Shakespearean performances, the activities of the minor characters all too often became blurred. Their words were drowned in their surroundings. There was too much to see to humour listening. Hence, it did not matter what they said; not until a scene was reached or a leading character held forth did attention become riveted. It led, involuntarily, I am sure, to a certain listlessness of the lesser performers. One remembered the multitude; rarely an individual. Under the new régime the small characters will begin to feel that they matter—that, however collateral, they are of moment to the play. Their detachment from outward paraphernalia will spur their ambition, convince them that it is the word and its utterance that matters; will induce them to dive deeper into their parts, strive for characterisation. From the public point of view, there will also be a sensing of detachment; as there is less ocular distraction the interest in the action will increase, and with it the appreciation of characters.

If only the innovation could be applied to musical comedy also! How it would affect the chorus, and promote them to be live beings

instead of remaining an automatic bevy which is always heard and is too often inaudible !

Galsworthy's latest splendid effort is a pretty sure indication of the course the British Drama is likely to take in these after-war days. The conflict of the people has taken the paramount place of the conflict of the peoples. The war of the classes, in the blunt word of money, has followed fire and sword.

Many will say that this work of Galsworthy is hard ; that the material side overwhelms the human nature. To assert this is both right and wrong. Superficially viewed, " The Skin Game " is beyond sympathy, and, if anything, the democratic characters come out better than the genteeler bunch. But listen carefully, and you will feel that the human chord is never wanting, except in the case of Lady Hillcrist, who is the incarnation of revenge. The others are, deep down, not only very human, but sympathetic. Hillcrist's daughter floats like a good fairy through the play ; and, shorn of his gruffness of manner and his blatancy, is there not in Hornblower something very pathetic in the fact that, with all his money, he cannot force aside the door—that under his own roof, while he was building, building up all the time, destruction was silently at work ?

What attracts me in Galsworthy's play is the depth of inwardness. Ostensibly he deals with one subject—and to me the question of over-building the land is the least interesting part—but almost every character represents not only an individual but a principle. Even the auctioneer in that wonderful scene of daring construction is not merely a utility of the stage, but embodies the thought that the value of things is not what they seem, but what you make them : just as the aristocrat at the end of the play and in his victory is not proud but sad, like another King Pyrrhus.

It is to be hoped that the general public will appreciate the social drama as it deserves. If it does, there is prospect that managers will follow suit, and realise that commercial success and artistic merit are not such strange bed-fellows as the London theatre since the war has made them.

CHAPTER X.—May 15th, 1920.

The Actors' Association. The Clemenceau of the French Stage.

THE Actors' Association, ever alive to its calling, has come forward with a bold scheme : a Trade Union Theatre by actors for actors.

The idea is to take a London theatre in July and form a répertoire of classics and, as Mr. Lugg calls them, "mode" plays : not merely new work graced by time-honoured names, but plays from the pens of new-comers—the Great Unacted, as we used to call them. The policy will be one of change—Shakespeare to-day, a modern play to-morrow, and so on. It is announced that in this way some three hundred people may be kept in occupation and pay, and it is hoped that after the first fling there will be a flight all over the land—in other words, a multiplication of the enterprise. It sounds promising, but will it work ? Will the public go to the performance ? Will the scheme pay ? Will the commonwealth—for that is what it amounts to—be one of peace and amity ? Wisely, I think, the promoters will begin by heading the rank and file by stars. This shows right understanding of the public, albeit that it implies no compliment to it. As it has been often said before, from the theatregoer's point of view the play matters in the second degree. We may not like to admit it, but the fact remains that he asks, first of all, who is acting, not what is acted ; and the author's name, unless he be one known to fame on the stage or in other directions—including Society—is scarcely of consequence at all. Thus, to make the enterprise alluring, at any rate in the beginning, the stars must be trumps. This settled, there arises the question of whether the public will be able to follow the play-bill if it changes too often. This is of very great importance. Unless much money can be spent on advertising, there may be confusion. People are slow of understanding in theatrical matters. Most of them do not know what is on, and in the répertoire régime, if they have had their attention drawn to a certain play, it may be just off when they want it to be on. Again, suppose three hundred people are to be employed, will the budget allow for such a salary list ? Will not very much capital be required to ensure safety, lest small box-office receipts may spell disaster ? I love the cry " For

actors by actors," but I fear that, unless a few business heads are joined to the artistic ones, enthusiasm may be pricked by the practical side of the question.

These co-operations of actors have been tried before, in our provinces and on the Continent; and, if my memory is not at fault, there is but one case of continued artistic and financial success. That was years ago at Rotterdam; and even that did not last, for prosperity in the long run did not make for unity. So the whole matter resolves itself into an economic one. Find the man whose artistic and business instinct qualifies him for leadership, and who at the same time understands the gentle art of diplomacy in his dealings with artists. With the right man at the helm, all other issues—the theatre, the plays, the company, apportionment of salaries, and division of profits—can be easily solved. The main idea is sane and timely. Co-operation is the mother of peace and welfare. Had we but understood it in the past! And it is just possible that from a Trade Union Theatre, rightly conducted, there may blossom forth that National Theatre of our dreams.

It would not be inapt to call Lucien Guitry the Clemenceau of the French Stage. He is its strong man. He got to the first place in the front rank by will power, by self-confidence. People hardly seem to remember now that years ago, when he tried *Macbeth*, Paris would have none of him. His personality was not one to secure superficial conquest. Stern in mien, burly in person, one associated him with force, which is not the same thing as power. He was not credited with subtlety. His voice was strong, but not melodious. Nor were his features illuminated by the lustre of intellect. One hardly remembers now how he established his supremacy. Was it his *Coupeau* in "*L'Assommoir*," grim tragedy grafted on melodrama?—was it Bernstein's "*Voleur*" or "*Samson*"?—was it "*Crainquebille*" of Anatole France?—was it his magnificent *Flambeau* in "*L'Aiglon*," which stirred French patriotism to the marrow? Gradually it became the fashion to single out Guitry. Every part revealed some new aspect of his talent. His personality became dominating. When he appeared

one felt the mystic influence of a somebody. He arrested attention, interest ; he unconsciously clapped the bushel on his surroundings. It was as if he carried the whole of the play ; his every word told ; he had acquired a wonderful gift of shading his speeches. In long tirades there was something august beyond description. Nor did Guitry ever remain Guitry. New parts formed a new man. Acting to him is not make-believe, nor a craft. It is, if I may put it so, the art of reincarnation. Even if he were not a past-master in make-up, he would never create the impression of sameness. Those features so stern, almost iron-cast, are as flexible as his voice. There is grimness in his humour, and yet in his smile there is much more than in the artificial laughter born of technique. His is the impressionism of humour. It outlines ; he leaves it to his hearer to develop, to amplify the intention. It means a tax, and a compliment ; but the Parisian audiences are alert, and always like to add mentally something of their own. In scenes of sorrow Guitry becomes a tragic figure. One then feels the impact of a strong personality with superior force. Guitry bent, broken, and in tears is not only pathetic ; he is harrowing. One thinks of the undoing of greatness, one thinks of felled columns, one thinks of ruins. It would be banal to call him a great actor. All the world has echoed it. We have said it in London when he played at the Garrick a good many years ago, and the general public was taught to admire him, yet was not rapturous as it will be now. For he has neither the manner nor the prepossessing flamboyancy of the actor *à la mode*. I would call him the super-actor—that rare combination of genius, self-confidence and intellect. For in whatever characters he creates he holds us by his complete penetration.

CHAPTER XI.—May 22nd, 1920.

Matheson's Lang's Othello. Kinema v. Theatre.

THE finest Othello on record is unostentatiously, at Wednesday matinées only, drawing great crowds to the New Theatre. It is to be hoped that the American invasion for the season will not forget Mr. Matheson Lang's Moor, for here is a creation which sheds lustre on the poet's work and its understanding by his kinsmen.

In the past we have seen the Moor in many shades, but there is no camouflage in Lang's appearance. He is as black as dead of night, and his white garments intensify his ominous features. If I read his conception correctly, two great notes predominate in it : dignity and jealousy. But dignity is the greater of the twain ; it never forsakes him, even when, bereft of his senses, he stifles the life-flame in Desdemona's frail body.

At first in his appearance before the Doge he is all restraint ; he speaks of deeds of prowess without bluster or loudness. He speaks with the calm decision of a strategist. He knows his own mind, and with becoming deference speaks it solemnly and convincingly. He warms when Desdemona appears, and with her he is so gentle, so loving, so submissively tender, as if he would express not only the devotion of a lover, but the protective spirit of a paternal friend. He is so tall and powerful ; she is so girlish and clinging. He damps his ardour lest his fervour might hurt his delicate charge. No Westerner could have been more delicate in wooing than this son of a sultry clime. Did we not know the gamut of Matheson Lang, we should wonder whether in the tragic scenes his seeming passiveness would grow to white heat. But wait. No sooner has Iago squirted the first drops of poison than another man arises within Othello. At first a waverer : he would not, could not, believe her treachery. Then a diplomatist, seething within, yet restraining his anger. At length, when, under Iago's insinuations, doubt becomes certainty, the power in the man waxes to ungovernable fury ; there is still dignity, but his wrath tears his soul, strains his muscles, fells him to earth like a pole-axed animal. I cannot help thinking of the wounded bulls at St. Sebastian in their awful agony.

When Othello, seemingly calm but with fell design in his bosom, enters the chamber, we are prepared for a terrible catastrophe. There

will be hurricane after a moment's lull. The Moorish blood will boil over in scorching heat ; he will immolate Desdemona in the paroxysms of unconscious ecstasy. He seems to see in her death an *auto da fé*. In that scene Matheson Lang is so real, there is such an absence of theatrical effort, that, although we shudder in awe, we do not avert our faces in repulsion. Victor Hugo was right when he said : "*Le laid, c'est le beau.*" It is a dangerous axiom, I know ; there are moments, however, when it becomes literally true in artistic impression.

And thus, anon, in violent contrast, but gently introduced, comes Othello's heartrending rue, his self-imposed requital. Then again, as in the love-scenes, we hear the note of tenderness, and mingled with it the bitter cry of despair. One feels almost inclined to symbolise the "had I but known" : this Moor, when his beloved breathes her last, recognises what he had, what he has lost ; his life is void without her : what futility this world is with its falseness for the sake of paltry causes ! I do not know whether the other playgoers felt like this when they beheld this rare creation. I forgot the plot and the play over the man, for the man meant to me a fragment of life—not of old Venice only, but of all times. I felt the struggle of nature against outward circumstances, and the superior power of the latter. Othello, thus I read Lang, was a real man with a childlike character, a man destined to go far in rectitude and valour. He might have been the ideal husband and father ; ambition and love were, according to his lights, the proudest possessions of life. But he forgot his descent, and when jealousy, the dangerous lackey of love, began to course through his veins, his blood became vitiated ; the nature of the beast came out free from restraint and culture. Othello, and particularly the Othello of Matheson Lang, is a powerful illustration of the duality of our mind. You may chase away Nature, as the French say, but she rushes back in a gallop. We are not masters of our fate ; there is in all of us a signpost that points to salvation or perdition, and not to swerve to the left is the privilege of the elect.

With his Othello, Matheson Lang, whose Shylock is unforgotten, has consolidated his place in the first line of our Shakespearean players ; indeed, no Shakespearean portrayal of latter days by an English actor has left so deep an impression of understanding and originality.

Miss Lena Ashwell, that gifted woman who is doing such excellent work in the lesser neighbourhoods of London in a *répertoire* of which the centre of the Metropolis might be proud, has bewailed the fact that the cinema is ousting the theatre. It cannot be gainsaid. But what is the reason? For a few shillings a man of the people can get a comfortable seat in a pretty place and a constant and varied appeal to his imagination. If one play is less good than another, the next number may bring change. Then there is always something to learn—industries, travel, inventions; last, but not least, there is the daily gazette of current events which takes the part of a living newspaper. In the theatre, if the play does not happen to interest, there is no appeal. The evening is wasted.

If we compare the plays that are running in London theatres and the plays produced at cinemas, it is difficult to say where the average playgoer gets better value for his money. I have very rarely gone to a cinema without some sort of satisfaction. How often do we go home from the theatre enriched in mind? How many plays of a year's campaign linger in memory? How many feats of acting in the Metropolis are greater in the aggregate than what the totality of the cinema shows pictorially? The trouble is that our film plays, for reasons of production and experience of actors, are generally less interesting than those which come from America, and it is a fact that so far some of our best actors have not been as effective on the film as one might have expected of them. The reason is partly economic, partly artistic. The Americans are not adverse to spending fortunes on one film, and our producing companies are more parsimonious. There is too much impression of fake, too little verisimilitude. For all that, many a time a film play is more fascinating than a play produced by provincial companies, mainly for the reason that we see and do not hear. But the main point is that the cinema by kaleidoscopic programme attracts the man in the street who has no particular plans, and that the theatre, as regards its cheaper seats, exacts from the playgoer that he should make up his mind beforehand, to say nothing of the vigil at pit and gallery doors and the lesser comforts in these parts of the house.

CHAPTER XII.—May 29th, 1920.

Mrs. Pat. Sacha.

TO watch Mrs. Patrick Campbell's performance of Eliza Doolittle in Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion" is, even now that the play is over-familiar to us, something more than a great pleasure. It tempts one to a more minute study of this remarkable actress, for it is a complete detachment of the character from all the characteristics we are wont to associate with the Mrs. Patrick Campbell of "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," "Magda," and all the other figures with which she has made histrionic history.

Once only, in the fourth act, when in the Professor's studio she listens motionless to the dissection of her nature and manners, Eliza Doolittle reminds us of Magda. She then forgets the flower-girl and sits statuesquely in front of the piano, a grand figure of a great lady. There is no trace left of the flower-girl, the Tottenham Court Road, the Cockney language and the crimson adjective. During her silence Mrs. Campbell remembers the "I am I," and for a brief spell there is, as it were, a conflict between the conception of the author and the interpretation by the actress. It is not a wilful deviation; it is the fault of a quality. Her nature is more powerful than the part.

But that scene excepted, what an enchanting make-belief! The very moment Eliza appears, shabby, bedraggled, uttering unmelodious sounds of gutter vocalisation, our breath is literally taken away. Can this be Mrs. Pat, the great lady, the perfect woman of the world, the overwhelming personality who, once she appears on the stage, mesmerises her audience as if by glances of the basilisk? Now, too, in that rain-drenched crowd in Covent Garden, she is the most arresting figure; but she does her best to subdue it; she commingles with the other people of the pavement and never would have us believe that she is the central figure. But there is something in Mrs. Campbell's voice, something in her eye and her attitude, which would convince others, and not the Professor only, that this flower-girl is not of the common clay—that she is beautiful (when washed), that she has a soul, that she is as lovable as the violets she sells, but that she requires different "potting." You

feel at once that, with the attunement of her ear, the brain and the manner will follow in unison, and of course you feel at once, too, that the Professor, bachelor in crust though he may be, will fall a victim to the woman upon whom he looked as a mere automaton for his diatribic methods.

It is the transition which is the most interesting part of this profound study of the actress. Although months elapse before her vernacular and her mentality become chastened, we, in our imagination, witness the whole process—the purification of vowels, the control of guffaw, the growing harmony of the awakening soul, and the new beautiful garments; last, but not least, the mastery over that most difficult letter “h.” When we meet her in the house of the Professor’s mother, we behold a new woman, not quite herself yet, fearful of her every word, embarrassed by the solemnity of her surroundings, carefully guarding her thoughts and ideas, a woman holding seemingly in either hand two great weapons, a hammer and a hatchet. The hammer falls on the “h” when it must be pronounced, as if to coin it firmly. The hatchet hacks away the “h” from an unaspirated word. The effect is immense, and nowise artificial. It is a common occurrence in Society when people strive to rise to new spheres of “culture.” That the metamorphosis of the flower-girl is not complete, that manners are but veneer, transpires when, in a moment of oblivion (and relief), Eliza comes out with the adjective that is taboo. It avenges, but it does not hurt. It sounds more like the “hurrah” of an excited crowd than a swear-word. It is, once more to recall the famous French saying, the return of Nature in a gallop. It is, in Mrs. Campbell’s conception, the last word of the Tottenham Court Road Eliza. Henceforth she will blossom into a lady, and by the end of the play there can be no doubt that Eliza has risen superior to her master both in manner and intellect. Wherefore it follows that he has to surrender to the tender mercies of her in whom he saw but an objective means to his ends.

The other week I tried to outline the talent of Guitry *père*; now let us look at the son, the Max Beerbohm of Paris—if it be not irreverential

to draw a comparison with a great difference. For years he has been the darling of Paris ; everybody has seen his plays ; everybody has quoted his sayings ; everybody takes an interest in his career ; everybody says " Sacha " with a little smile, yet inwardly with a little envy. When he was young and lean he stole many hearts ; now that he is more rotund and less cherubic he makes the conquest of brains. What he touches succeeds. His plays—are there forty-five or thirty-five ? I lose count, and only know that he has seven new ones up his sleeve—his plays completed in some seventeen years represent the work of another man's lifetime. Moreover, who can boast with Sacha Guitry that his comedies have succeeded in every country and in his own ? Recently he started a new paper in Paris, and before the first edition was out its success was assured, for the most brilliant men and women in France have contributed to it, and the young editor heralded greater things to come.

But I would speak of the actor, and to say that he is unique is no exaggeration. You may have seen all the great comedians of France, whether their name be Coquelin or Baron, but none of them had the extraordinary spontaneity of Sacha. He is both a *gamin* and an exquisite wit. He has all the peculiarities of the *boulevardier*, but he can equally affect the grand manner of the Faubourg, or the dry-as-dust methodical starchiness of the Government official. He can smile like a cynic born, yet he can also smile as sweetly as a siren, or a courtier, or a wooer, or a tempter, or an angel, or a little devil. As a matter of fact, he has what the French call *le diable au corps*.

Watch him in " La Prise de Berg-op-Zoom," with the calendar. Is not every wink, every twist of his elegant fingers, an insinuation, a touch of strategy, a restrained assurance of success, a subdued jubilation before the event ? He plays with words and phrases as a juggler with pith balls ; he flings them out and about in seeming haphazard, now at his fellow-players, now to himself, now right bang into the audience : they coruscate here, there, and everywhere, but one thing is certain—they never go astray. No marksman could be surer of his aim. He loves the exciting pace. I can hear him say at rehearsal : " *Faut que ça mousse,*" which is even more than sparkle. It is the

nearest thing to hustling. But hustling is vehement, is common; the Sacha method is natural, is racy of the soil. It strikes one as if one were sitting on the terrace of the Café de la Paix, watching two Parisians telling a tale—probably an adventure. Their tongue propels the words in bewildering quantity, their arms are signalling all around them, their bodies sway to and fro—they are all in ferment and excitement, and probably they narrate a very simple little affair which an Englishman would utter with a faint smiling curve of the lips.

This is Sacha's greatest gift. He knows his public to the core. He knows that it is "the tone which makes the music." Glib as he is, he never slurs; every syllable has its little entity, its little spark of life, but he links them up so cleverly that we are as enmeshed in an endless rope of mirth; it goes on and on and never slackens until the last word is spoken. Then one says, "Ouf!" but in the same breath: "What a comedian!"

CHAPTER XIII.—June 5th, 1920.

Pasteur. Vesta Tilley.

OF all the wonderful things which the Guitrys have shown us at the Aldwych, "Pasteur" is the most unforgettable. As I came away I was speechless. I had not been to the theatre: I had lived another man's life—lived with him from his combative manhood, his mellowing maturity, to the apogee of age—glorious in the world's adoration at the Académie de Médecine—yet infinitely sad. For the gnarled oak was tottering; the life-force was ebbing out; the brain, of yore so clear and lucid and trenchant, was gradually becoming benumbed. It was not Pasteur whom the President of the Republic led to the rostrum of jubilation, it was his shadow. He who had devoted his years, his knowledge, his unrivalled perseverance to the preservation of humanity, was living evidence of the limitations that beset all that which is human. Pasteur in his hour of glory was the incarnation of the tragedy of mankind—finality.

Ere that we had passed with him through storm and stress; we had ascended the great height towards recognition; we had reached with him the pinnacle—his discovery of the serum that would save the world from hydrophobia. And in this onward march we had learned to know three Pasteurs. There was Pasteur the master among his disciples, where his word was law, where his presence spread reverential awe. There was Pasteur the fighter, who in the wonderful scene at the Académie flung the gauntlet at the head of the profession and carried on such verbal warfare that the Presidential bell had to hush him into silence, to oust him from the tribune. At that moment we thought of the great man who defied the Inquisition—Galileo. Pasteur, defeated, in so many words repeated his dictum, "And yet the world moves"—the time would come when his scientific theories would laugh all medical opposition to scorn.

So far we had learned little of the inner, the real, man. His figure was great and arresting, but was there a heart beneath the broad-cloth? This man lived in obedience to principles: to swerve from them was unworthy; he had no patience with people who let outward influences

over-rule the sense of duty. When one of his colleagues, who was devoted to him, indicated that woman had overwhelmed his feelings and his senses, when he heard the confession of an agonising soul, he had no other solace to offer than—work! and he sent him thence to find salvation in research.

Yet we shall learn that in this rugged husk there lived a most sensitive soul. A little boy is brought to him from far away in the country. He had been bitten by a mad dog, and in the village they had learned that Pasteur had made his great discovery. So with fear and trembling the grandfather leads the child to the master. Pasteur was convinced of his serum, yet so far he had never tried it on a human being. Shall he risk it on this little child? Dare he venture a life to save a life? His struggle is intense, and, as he decides on the great gamble, his solicitude grows to unspeakable anguish. He would not entrust the vigil after the injection to his trusted collaborators; he would sit at the bedside and watch until the fateful fortnight had run its course. That firstling who proved his cure is forever dear to him. For deep down in his mind lingers the fear that in days to come symptoms may prove that the remedy is as great a danger as the evil against which he used it. So when, after three years, the boy, grown to strength, comes to him, now aged and feeling that his own end is on the horizon, he pets him with paternal love, beseeches him to be sure and let him know month by month how he fares. He gives him six addressed envelopes. "Only six?" says the child, and with grim humour the ageing man replies: "Perhaps you would like the whole box?" And in his saying so we hear forebodings of sadness. It is a scene without any pretence, but how it goes home! It strikes the human chord, and its vibration is lasting.

There are no women in this play, and it might be argued that in the completeness of portrayal there is but one character. Yet, strangely enough, it cannot be said that the female influence is wholly absent; for when Pasteur speaks of his wife and family we see them in our mind's eye; and when the younger doctor, so finely played by M. Leitner, reveals his soul, we seem to witness a great conflict between a man and a

woman. It is, as it were, a scene created by suggestion. Again, it would be incorrect to say that this is entirely a one-man play, although the one man dominates it from beginning to end. Indeed, we have no mere blurred vision of the other characters, whether they be the thumbnail sketches of the other doctors, marvellously vitalised in a few apt sentences in the Académie scene, or portrayed more elaborately in the pathetic figure of his assistant and the grandfather and the child, both drawn in living perfection, who fill the stage in the study scene more effectively than a dozen lay-figures in plays of action.

There is no need on my part to belaud and elaborate that towering creation of Lucien Guitry. If I have succeeded in conveying the meaning of the play it is because in outlining Pasteur I have recorded my impression of Guitry. As an achievement, nothing in modern acting equals the "ages of a man" as moulded by the great French actor. He has solved the immense problem, not only with the aid of wigs and grease-paint, but by inwardness and self-oblivion, of demonstrating the law of change of a life-time in the brief span of one evening.

Vesta Tilley has decided once and for all to be Lady de Frece. She is saying good-bye to Algy and Tommy, to Father's footsteps and to the millions of England who are preparing a huge scroll of honour as a parting gift. When an artist so popular—I would almost say so idolised—speaks of retirement, we always cherish a secret hope that "Farewell" may yet mean "Au revoir"; that the lure of the footlights will call her back; that far from the madding crowd she may begin to hunger for the daily ration of applause which is dearer to the player than even the largesse of salary. Not every artist has the staunchness of purpose of an Emily Soldene and Hortense Schneider, to live upon past glories and let the world run its course. Nor do I, as the onlooker, see why they should retire before age marks time. A woman like Vesta Tilley is an everlasting joy, and evergreen she remains, although she told us in her little speech that she had been on the stage for—here she hesitated—many years. Her art is as subtle as ever; her diction, always remarkable for its clearness, has, if anything, become more telling; she never exhibits

any signs of fatigue or "routine." Fresh as paint as she looks, so is her delivery, and the more we listen the more we value her gifts. Her very appearance is all that prepossession means. She looks the idealised boy and Tommy. She wears the daintiest clothes—oh, for the address of her tailor! Her face looks like a city in illumination. Her smile, always spontaneous, spreads joy of living, joy in the work, joy in the gentle raillery of her victims, be they Algy, Tommy, or Father. But that is the surface. There is much more in her creations. "Cabby knows his fare." She knows the young "knot" of to-day, his whims, his ways, his little elegances. She also knows the soldier. The secret of Vesta Tilley is that she sees things and people through our eyes, and that she irresistibly appeals to our sense of humour, whether we be of the stalls or of the gallery. It is the touch of human nature that tells.

For that we love her; for that—let us be candid—we watched the preceding part of an excellent programme in somewhat expectant impatience; for that we felt a little flutter when she appeared, and we revelled in the hurricane of applause that greeted her and raged for many minutes when she had yielded the last encore. And when she addressed a few modest, well-chosen words of thanks to the audience, there was a tremor in her voice which betokened that she too felt the sweet sorrow of parting, and that this time her smile shielded a tear.

*Father and Son (the Guitrys). A History of the American Stage.
In Christiania.*

THE renowned firm of Guitry *père et fils* is leaving us soon—not for long, let us hope—and the culmination of their triumphant season has been the joint appearance of the two senior partners and the delightful junior, Mlle. Yvonne Printemps. Of course, in English a play like “*Mon Père Avait Raison*” would seem impossible. The difference of moral conceptions is very marked. If an English author were to preach hedonism and Turkish principles where women are concerned, he would be condemned with bell, book, and candle. But that is the peculiarity of French. You may utter things which in translation would seem gross, yet in the original have a graceful air of badinage, as if the author were saying: “Of course, I don’t mean it. You mustn’t take me seriously! I just want to amuse you; let it go through the right and pass out through the left ear, and pray laugh with me. I do so want to make you happy.” And thus, with a cunning knack of mental agility, he veneers his reprehensible theories with a finer moral. What the father says to the son about the part that women should play in a man’s life, is merely the braggadocio of age in its struggle to maintain youth. What he really preaches is “Keep young; look upon life as a big adventure; do not let a blow fell you down [his wife has run away and announced her departure by telephone]; seek solace and you will find it; above all, in pursuing happiness for yourself, try to make it for others.” And then this older man, more a pal than a father, paves the way for a happy marriage between his son and the *petite amie* who, despite her humbleness, would make an excellent mate for him. Incidentally, there is a pathetic note when the wife who had eloped comes back after twenty years to ask him for condonation of the past. We then feel a certain pity for the crestfallen woman, yet we understand why the quality of mercy cannot be extended to her. There may be forgiveness for a lapse, but there is none for oblivion of duty when there is a child left half-orphaned. And so the father, big though be his heart, sends her hence, with the somewhat cynical

consolation that if *he* cannot be merciful, *time* has been kind. She may yet find anchorage in life. In this scene Guitry the father was deeply moving, although he had to utter cold, hard truths. He made us feel the void of all these years when he was left alone, widowed, to bring up the son with a mother's care in a fatherly heart.

When one sees the two Guitrys together there is a great similarity of personality and method. Both are so familiar with the stage that they create the semblance of reality. Both are masters of diction. Both understand that the meaning of a word is dependent on its utterance. Both are great in illustrating the dialogue by gesture. Guitry *père* outlines middle-age by a certain breadth of movement, by a smile of *bonhomie*, by comfortable strides, stretches, by marking time, in deliberate movements which never fail to tell. Sacha Guitry is more mercurial. He bursts with energy. He is all nerve power. The words rush torrentially from his lips. He is ever agile, ever doing something, and one is always wondering what he will do next—just as in his plays one is always expecting the unexpected. Behold them both at the telephone, which plays a great, and for the first time a natural, part in this play. It is an achievement to handle the telephone in a play so that it does not become a technical *pons asinorum*. Lucien Guitry listens gravely, answers gravely, in parsimonious play of features and hands. When his wife tells him that their connubial life must end then and there, he does not fly into a passion. He lets his voice sink deeper and deeper; he answers less and less fluently; in his halting there is the sound of emotion. At length, when he softly hangs up the receiver, there is a moment of silence, he wipes his brow. That is all, and it speaks volumes. Sacha, on the other hand, looks upon the telephone as a lawyer on a hostile witness. He goes for it with a rush; he babbles into it in hot haste; his words stumble over one another, become staccato; his features change; his hands nervously play with wire and instrument. In the end he dashes back the receiver—he does not say it, but he conveys: "*Fichez-moi la paix!*" His is the exuberance of youth; the father's is the poise of middle-age. The juxtaposition is exquisite. The artists have the divine gift of showing life as we see it ourselves.

To collect all the details contained in Arthur Hornblow's "History of the Theatre in America" (published by Lippincott Company) would seem to comprise the work of a lifetime: it covers the history of the American stage from the early eighteenth century up to 1919. It is amazingly interesting—facts and more or less technical data being cleverly interwoven with personal anecdotes and characteristic sidelights on the business and artistic workers of the theatre. Nothing has been overlooked, nothing excluded, from the erection of the theatres to the progress of the dramatists and the development of the performers.

Speaking of Mr. Hornblow, it is interesting to record that in May there was a celebration in New York in commemoration of the twenty years' existence of the *Theatre Magazine*, of which Mr. Hornblow is the editor. The jubilee number is duly gigantic, and on a scale of luxury scarcely known in this country. Many leading critics, dramatists, managers, and actors have contributed to its richly illustrated pages, and it is of some significance that the Governor of the State of New York sent a letter to the publishers to congratulate them on their proud record.

Here's a long life to the *Theatre Magazine*, and the wish that Mr. Hornblow may come one day to London to initiate us into one of those things that they do better in America! For neither in England nor on the Continent is there any periodical devoted to the theatre which in variety and catholicity can vie with the *Theatre Magazine*.

In Christiania the cinema theatres are managed by the city and the profits are used for the benefit of artistic institutions and pension funds. During July to December 1919, the Municipal Council made a net profit of 900,000 kronen, and they were distributed as follows—

To the People's Theatre	...	...	...	...	kr. 400,000
A studio for the national sculptor Vigeland	...	...	...	...	150,000
A new concert-hall	...	...	...	...	100,000
Films for schools	...	...	...	...	50,000
Pension fund for actors of the National Theatre	...	...	...	...	200,000

Here is food for reflection for the County Council, the Labour Party, the Drama League, and the Cinema World!

CHAPTER XV.—June 19th, 1920.

George Sand—*forsooth!* *Alhambra Revue.*

“DON'T destroy my illusions!” is a golden saying which I would frame in everybody's mental chamber, for illusions are half the charm of life. I thought of this when I saw the “Madame Sand” play at the Duke of York's Theatre. It is not an unskilful play in its way, nor should it be approached with a high brow; it is simply bold journalism in the best American sense. To me it seemed that the author had laid hold of Mr. Francis Gribble's book, “George Sand and Her Lovers,” or a kindred volume, had run through it, picked here and there a phrase, a character sketch, a silhouette, and pinned them together with sewing-machine stage-craft. And all the time I had the feeling that Mr. Moeller knew very little of the souls of his characters, and a great deal of their clothes and their mannerisms, as handed on by newspaper gossip of the time, or by memories—which mostly turn molehills of events and sayings into mountains of vital importance.

But let all that pass: it is a great task to transplant to the stage those who are almost contemporaries; it is not everybody's gift to create a Pasteur play; and perhaps somebody would say: “Then why attempt it?”—which is not fair. With all its faults, this Sand play is far more interesting than a dozen others now running in London. It stimulates imagination. You have but to scan the characters: Musset, Chopin, Liszt, and (which means a great deal to some of us) Buloz! Buloz, who to a certain extent was the maker of genius in the Second Empire, who had a literary *flair* and a commercial sense unrivalled, who by one article accepted in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* could make a man famous! I wonder how many among the first-nighters saw anything more in Buloz's character than an ordinary newspaper “boss”!

But where Mr. Moeller fails is in despoiling us of our illusions. George Sand was not a regular courtesan, in breeches and smoking big cigars, with the instinct of an interviewer who says at every good thing he hears: “Capital copy!” and marks it down. She was an *amoureuse* of high culture, a charmer of men more by the word even than by her graces, a thinker, a plodder, a worker; one who worshipped form

and style, and would polish her work in wakeful nights until it glittered like flawless brilliants. In the play she is merely farcical—Quartier Latin reminiscent of Murger's Mimi. As for De Musset, though he was enacted as beautifully by Mr. Basil Rathbone as George Sand by Mrs. Patrick Campbell, was he merely wormwood and wishy-washyness? Was there nothing of the poet in him in his intervals of control? The main vision of the play is the spectacle of a man, evidently recovering from a night of cups, emerging from a four-poster while his mistress is making love to his doctor. To think of it, and then to go to the bookshelf and pick a volume of the "Nuits"! Again, to think of Heinrich Heine (another cameo of acting), distinguished of tongue, yet with a *penchant* towards gluttony, and the table manners entirely foreign to one so refined in taste, so critical of others, so wholly Parisianised that he transformed his own language to unapproachable grace! To think of Liszt, the dreamer, the charmer, the ethereal, the exquisite courtier, re-moulded by the dramatist into a comic busybody, and thus played by Hector Abbas with real humour! There is but one whom we meet without feeling the pain of destroyed illusions. That was the Chopin, a picture in Mr. Samson's delicate emotion. Here, at length, we felt what might have been if Mr. Moeller had applied imagination instead of craft. He, in his almost angelic eeriness, came into this crowd of depoetised figures as something supernatural. He, in his short scene with George Sand, when she beguiled him as she beguiled Musset and the doctor, with the manner of a grisette, stood aloof and alone. We seemed to hear his music, we seemed to recognise him; for he, in image and parlance, vitalised the figure as it hovers in our thought. Yet we came away in a strange spirit of disappointment, in spite of having been entertained. The play had rent our illusions.

Three impressions remain predominant after a vision of the new Alhambra revue. It is emphatically a one-man show, there are two unforgettable scenes, and there is the dancing of—Miss Phyllis Bedells.

Mr. George Robey carries this huge structure like an Atlas. When he is on the stage, there is gaiety—not overwhelming as yet, but Robey has but to wink an eye or lift an eyebrow, and the public is pleased.

He is loyally helped by Miss St. Helier, a charming, very painstaking artist who has fine notes in her voice, who works with a will, but who has not that magnetism of, say, an Ethel Levey or a Violet Loraine. Somehow, between her and Mr. Robey, there is collaboration but not assimilation. It would appear as though Miss St. Helier is somewhat abashed when she plays with Mr. Robey—he who is always playing with the unexpected, who invents humour when the librettist leaves him in the lurch.

Of the two scenes, the Palace of Haroun al Raschid is like a leaf from the Arabian Nights. In the subdued light there is dreaminess in the costumes ; there is rare discretion of undertone. The groups are magnificent, almost sculptural, and the dancing of Miss Phyllis Bedells is wholly delightful. She is now the English ballet-dancer *par excellence*, and she should not be compared with the Russian dancers. By any other name Miss Phyllis Bedells would betray that she is English to the core in the most graceful sense of the word. She, too, wafts through the air like Pavlova ; but it is a different agility, it is less ethereal, also less studied. Miss Bedells loses herself entirely in her work : she loves it ; she smiles with all her limbs as well as with her face ; she makes one think of old-world merry-making in Merrie England. Her art is simple, and although her technique is perfect it is never obtrusive. It grows on one, and, if it does not literally take one's breath away, it leaves an impression of something exceedingly fragrant, girlish, young, sincere.

And then there is the scene at Versailles—Versailles as it lives in history in France's golden age, with the stateliness of its buildings, the glittering play of its fountains, the exquisiteness of hoop and wig, the daintiness of manner and hypnotising charm of the minuet ! It is almost a pity that at a certain moment Mr. Robey forgets his Louis XV. and indulges in the accents of Cockaigne. It was so beautiful as it was in its reminiscence of an age of grace. Now modern notes seemed to jar ; it made one think of the Revolutionary crowd desecrating the royal palaces of Louis XVI. when he was ousted from the Tuileries. It I had been the producer I would have left this lovely vision of glorious Versailles alone, in all its glory.

CHAPTER XVI.—June 26th, 1920.

The Centenary of the Stage Society. A Note on Réjane.

THE Stage Society gave last week its hundredth performance, and it is well, on the celebration of this proud record, to recall in a few words what it has done since it was founded in 1899. I cannot quite remember who fathered this lineal descendant of the Independent Theatre, but three names dwell paramount in memory—Janet Achurch, Charles Charrington, and Frederick Whelen, who was for many years one of the driving forces of the vigorous Society. It had from the start three great helpmates—first, the sympathetic support of the so-called “Earnest Students” of the Drama, people who were willing to subscribe to the funds and were as happy when the ballot for seats sent them to the gallery as when it elected them to the stalls. These “Earnest Students” were recruited from all sorts and conditions of men and women, and the scroll of members boasts of many famous names. The second great auxiliary force were the actors, who at once grasped the idea of a new opening for the employment of spare time and for emerging from the common rut. For years the actors have stood by the Stage Society and worked like Trojans for a small “cachet” and, sometimes, a great chance. If many actors have risen to greater fame by the aid of the Stage Society, it cannot at the same time be gainsaid that the Stage Society owes a great deal to the actors. To study a part as long as Hamlet—as was not infrequently the case—for the sake of two performances only, is evidence of loving one’s art beyond all dreams of avarice! At length—third in the triumvirate—came the authors. Practically from the beginning “G.B.S.” lent his storehouse to the Society, and whenever Shaw was on the programme up went membership, interest, and prestige. No fewer than eight plays by Shaw appear in the list of a hundred, and six of them—mostly world-famed by this time—were ceded by him for first production.

With such a power behind the throne the Stage Society could gaily sail ahead. But that was not all. The new outlet attracted writers hitherto holding aloof from the stage because their work did not warrant box-office results. I need only mention Arnold Bennett, whose “Cupid

and Common-sense" proved afterwards that the play of a literary man may have the same drawing capacities as mere craftsmanship; and his "What the Public Wants," with its wonderful insight into journalism, flourished at the Royalty long after its triumphant début at the Stage Society. Granville Barker, too, was a discovery of the Stage Society, and many will remember that after the performance of "The Marrying of Ann Leete," there was much discussion as to the mentality of the author. Some called him a genius; some could see nothing in this bizarre play; yet a third category of playgoers was impressed by the author's quality of style and imagination, as well as disturbed by his want of logical sequence. However, in "Waste" Granville Barker showed what there was in him. It is one of the boldest plays of the modern English répertoire: it is discursive to a degree, but its characters are alive, and years after we have become acquainted with them we remember their individuality. Two plays more may be mentioned to indicate that the Stage Society is right in claiming, by the mouth of its present Treasurer, Mr. J. S. Kennedy, that its main achievement is the discovery of playwrights. I have but to name "The Man of Honour," by Somerset Maugham, and the late St. John Hankin's "The Two Mr. Wetherbys," which immediately, as it were, hall-marked the writers—the one as a realist (who, however, has been equally successful in humorous romance), the other as a writer of real comedy of manners.

And thus I might go on reeling off names and titles of British work and foreign to substantiate how well the Society has deserved of our Drama. It has made its mistakes—what human being or institution has not?—it has sometimes created the impression that it was running into grooves and ruled by cliques, but that is of small account when the work done is thrown into the scale. In our Theatre the Stage Society, in spite of its not having a fixed abode, has cemented its own place; and it is, perhaps, not presumptuous to express the hope that henceforth it will be looked upon by the regular managers not merely as a kind of freakish museum, an intellectual refuge of the destitute, but as a splendid auxiliary channel to increase the répertoire of the Commercial Theatre.

This hundredth play of the Society, "The S.S. *Tenacity*," by Charles Vildrac, and very fluently translated by Harold Bowen, came from the Parisian Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, one of those little temples of fine art where the newcomer as well as the classics find open portals and a splendid interpretation under the guidance of Jacques Copeau. Nothing simpler than the happenings in this play could be well imagined. Two demobilised French soldiers, weary of waiting for work, come to a little coastal place to embark for the land of promise, Canada. The men are friends, but wholly different in character. Bastien is matter-of-fact and full of energy; Segard is a dreamer, who extracts a certain happiness of life in the idealisation of things that are. Through a defect the steamer *Tenacity* cannot sail for some weeks; the men are meantime waiting in the little tavern, where they are made welcome by the landlady and her maid. Bastien is eager for the steamer to get ready; Segard is swayed by the nostalgia of France and his growing affection for the little maid. He tells her of his day-dreams, and he believes that he is making headway. His way of speaking interests her, but does not create love, whereas she is drawn to Bastien of the strong arms, the impetuous ways, and the fervent kisses. These two one evening at a late hour become lovers, and every following night during the last week of the *Tenacity's* anchorage is a feast of young love. Segard sees nothing; still waits in the fool's paradise of possibilities. Then, on the morning of sailing, Bastien and the girl pack their traps, and take train for the North. What is Segard to do?—he, the lonely soul who would have loved to stay with her, who would, in his docile way, have followed his friend to Canada, who is swayed by the currents of life like a piece of cork on the waters. At length he goes on board—drifting towards the uncertainty of the future.

That is all there is to it, with no more by-play than the humorous vapourings of a drink-loving idler who works when he likes, and vaunts of himself that he is the only free man extant. It is the kind of play that seems so commonplace, so simple, that nearly every dramatist in the bud would feel tempted to say, "I can write a play like that on my head." There is no real plot, no evidence of studied technique;

it is just told like an ordinary story, without finery and trappings of any kind. Yet those who know the four corners of the Drama feel that it is exactly the sort of play which the fewest could write and the fewest would write, because, from our point of view, there is "no money in it." But in France it was a success, and the Stage Society audience, too, seemed to enjoy it. Why? Because the touch of nature was there; because the characters talked from within; because the underlying idea—never obtruded—that the current of life is more powerful than the determination of man, led to introspection; because there was passion in it, and in Segard's character a touch of the phantasmagoria which sometimes, somehow, traverses all normal minds, irrespective of age.

Lastly, it was a success because the acting was of rare evenness and gentle realism. The drunkard of Mr. Franklin Dyall; the Bastien of Mr. Basil Sydney—a type in aspect and speech, he has never done anything so real; the maid of Miss Nell Carter, in her irresistible yielding to the call of love—all these were creations of artistic merit; but the Segard of Mr. J. H. Roberts was the finest of all. The play lasted not much more than one short hour, yet the mental harvest exceeded in richness many evenings spent in the theatre.

A past impression of Réjane. Réjane as an artist reminded me of the French woman who gave an explanation of her perennial domestic felicity. She had married a man of wayward, reckless character, a man as fickle as the mood of a theatrical audience. Yet she held him tight, was to him the one woman in the world, and all she could offer as an argument was that "she strove every day to make a fresh conquest of his love."

In Réjane there was no question of constant change to end in invariable sameness. Réjane was unaccountable. She would play a part a hundred times, and a hundred times she would change the key, change the effect, the stress on words, the manner of gesture. She was never her own understudy; she scorned the tradition of her own conception. A restless worker spurred by genius, she was ever in search of new light

upon the same subject, of countries unexplored. If I read her mental composition aright, her doctrine was that in histrionic work the last word is never spoken. The possibilities of characterisation are as infinite as the depth of nature in every mortal individual. Her greatest parts were "Madame Sans-Gêne," "Zaza," "The Marriage of Kitty," and "La Course du Flambeau." In all four she has shone in London in a glamour unforgettable.

CHAPTER XVII.—July 10th, 1920.

The Pioneers. "Daddalums."

"S.O.S." is the signal hoisted by "The Pioneers," the splendid craft of which Edith Craig is master and pilot. For years she has stood at the head of affairs: she built the ship; she manned it; she stood firm at the tiller in fair weather and in storm, and now there is grave peril. If there is no more money forthcoming the Pioneers must give up; the rise of prices in the theatrical world, and everywhere else, has rendered self-support, at first precarious, at length impossible.

It must be confessed that the ominous announcement of Miss Craig that her recent production would be the last unless Mæcenas—or somebody else with the sinews of war—came to the rescue, was something more than a surprise. For on the programme is found a committee so full of sounding names—in every sense of the word—that one wonders why all and sundry did not join hands to subscribe such little capital as was annually needed to cover a deficit which cannot have exceeded a few hundreds of pounds. In these cases of art and necessity, I fear that in our artistic world there is too much lip-service and too little initiative to substantiate enthusiasm by some act of sacrifice.

However, it is not the economic side with which I am concerned, but the great loss that our theatre will suffer if the Pioneers cease to exist. It is a welcome—if somewhat sad—opportunity to pay a tribute to Miss Edith Craig for what she has done, mainly of her own initiative, for our drama. Practically the whole burden of the productions fell on her shoulders and those of her able A.D.C., Miss Christopher St. John. Miss Edith Craig was not only director, but she cast and produced her plays in independence. Hence the performances bore the impress of a distinct individuality. There is not mere family affinity between Ellen Terry's gifted children, Edith and Gordon Craig. In their scenic work, created by both in countries wide apart—Gordon lives mostly in Italy—there is no fear of collision. Yet there is similarity. Both are believers in simplicity. Both have an architectural eye for the possibilities of drapery. Both see atmosphere in impressionist outline. Both have the decorative instinct where costumes are concerned, and for the constellation of colours, often bold and bizarre, generally striking, yet symphonic.

We remember scenes of terraces at night, of cafés, of interiors at the Pioneers, as so many canvases at an exhibition.

To come to Edith Craig's specific work : her predominant gift is not merely the creation of the picture, but its vitality. She knows how to find actors and to mould them. (*En passant*, we think of Sybil Thorndike, Meggie Albanesi.) She generally casts right, and gives her actors a chance of making a mark. She does more : she makes her fellow-workers see things, penetrate their characters. For she has, by observation or intuition, a cosmopolitan mind. Think of her wonderful Heyermans productions, "Good Hope" and "The Rising Sun"; then think, in swift contrast, of Claudel and his mysticism ; and in the comparison arises a great differentiation—between something that is very concrete (Heyermans) and something very abstract (Claudel), provided that the actors rise to the subtlety of the latter.

In her desire to be universal, Miss Craig has now and again vainly endeavoured to fit in English that which is essentially foreign, notably French. I remember an adaptation of "La Femme et le Pantin," by Pierre Louys. It was like the villain's revolver—it did not go off. Yet even when Miss Craig has not succeeded, one felt that her desire was not to follow craze and fashion, but to widen the horizon of our stage. And in this direction she has, single-handed, done more than half-a-dozen regular theatres.

On the scroll of the Pioneers there is a momentous list of original plays, not a few by women, of whose cause in art Miss Edith Craig has been the doughtiest champion. May, at the eleventh hour, the remembrance of all she has achieved bring to the Pioneers the golden rays which mean a new lease of life !

It is not of the play "Daddalums," by Louis Anspacher, which Mr. Louis Calvert has brought from America, that I would say much. It is the homely, wholesome story of the bootmaker who grew rich, flourished his wealth after the manner of the *nouveaux riches*, doted on his son—destined to be a gentleman and a stockbroker—and lost his money much faster than he made it because he was a foolish father.

No need to relate the return of the prodigal to his poor but happy sire. We came away with the impression that we had listened to a pleasant homily, leavened with gentle humour, and that we had seen some splendid acting by Louis Calvert, Edyth Olive, and Francis Lister. Louis Calvert has come back to stay, and we are all the richer for his return. His way is a wonderful amalgam of the old sound school of diction and of modern simplicity. His technique is so subtle that you hardly notice that he is acting. He ambles through the part as if he had never lived in other surroundings. He makes us laugh and he makes us feel because he is genuine. One hardly perceives his transitions from the boisterousness of the man of money to the tenderness of a sentimental father who at a crucial moment, to save the family honour, became a hero. There was in the voice and figure of that powerful artist Louis Calvert—powerful in gait and build as well as histrionic equipment—something so infinitely pathetic that our imagination wandered from "Daddalums" to "King Lear."

Here, in "Daddalums," was the King Lear of the "allotment," as it were: now will Louis Calvert give us the great King Lear of Shakespeare. He is the actor to do it, in more ways than one. Has he not, by his bold book on "Hamlet," proved that he is a man of ideas (whether we read them in assent or protest), and that we may expect a conception from him untrammelled by tradition? It would, of course, be a great and costly undertaking, the more so as Calvert's scheme of production discards the curtains to return to the more elaborate scenery. But there never was a period in modern times when the public was so keen to worship the Bard. Somehow, after the trivialities of many years, there seems to be a great desire to let ear and brain have a spell of joy. Hence the success of such plays as "The Skin Game," "The Grain of Mustard Seed," "Mary Rose," all three of them distinguished for style. Hence the constant flow of new Shakespeare ventures, recently even in open-air performances in Hyde Park, which attracted thousands and aroused enthusiasm. If Louis Calvert succeeded in finding his peers to man Shakespeare's most touching tragedy, he would be sure of a great success. For years we have been waiting for the real Lear.

CHAPTER XVIII.—July 24th, 1920.

Our Conservatoire.

THE Academy of Dramatic Art, in Gower Street—Sir Herbert Tree's most lasting creation—is but sixteen years old, and it is no exaggeration to say that its fruitfulness has exceeded all expectations. It passed through childhood without the world noticing the inward struggles to gain experience. In his wisdom and foresight Tree soon perceived that this was too great a thing for one pair of shoulders, so he sought counsel, and found it with the leaders of the profession and the leading dramatists of the time. With these a Council was formed, at whose head stands the ever-green Sir Squire Bancroft, one who, with "a name to conjure with," devotes most of his time and unflagging energy to the finance, tuition, and household of the institution. His *alter ego*—if I may call him so—is Mr. Kenneth Barnes, the administrator, who since 1919 has lent his zeal and splendid practical sense to the Academy, except during war-time, when he joined the colours and was ably represented by Mr. C. M. Lowne.

In Mr. Barnes the scholars have not only a friend and philosopher, but also a guide. He knows the stage and all its works—is he not a brother of the gifted Vanbrughs?—he speaks to his pupils with understanding and knowledge. He has the *feu sacré* that inspires. Only the other day, when I asked him for a few more precise details about the school, with which as an Associate I am well conversant, he urged me to plead to the well-endowed of this world for "scholarships," so that talented exponents who have no private means, no friends to supply them, may obtain the excellent theatrical education which, under masters of their craft, is given at the Academy. Imagine it! For a mere fifty guineas per annum the students are initiated (aye, and perfected) in all the rudiments of the art, from elocution and the Delsartian method of expression in gesture, to dancing, fencing, and French. For fifty guineas the students may listen to eminent men of letters, who freely (and free of charge) come to lecture to them. For fifty guineas it may be their good fortune to be produced, not only by such actors as Norman Page, Arthur Whitby, Helen Haye, Elsie Chester, Gertrude Bennett—

forgive me that I do not name all who are worthy of it—but by Sir Arthur Pinero, Sir James Barrie, or Mr. Bernard Shaw, whenever their time permits and their plays are in the time-table. Hitherto, all their rehearsals have taken place in the improvised schoolroom; but from October the young generation will act in their own real theatre in Malet Street, at the back of Gower Street. For fifty guineas the student of the Academy may proudly boast, "I belong to the finest, most up-to-date theatre in London." Structurally, Mr. Geoffrey Norman's design is perfect. Now that it is equipped, thanks to the munificence of several donors, including Sir Squire Bancroft, it looks a little jewel-box, and from its four hundred seats every spectator will have an unbroken view of the stage. And if I have not yet urged my claim for endowment cogently enough, let me just dangle before your eyes a few names of the many who have found their place in the sun after happy years of learning in Gower Street: Owen Nares, Miles Malleson, Kenneth Kent, Meggie Albanesi, Winifred Barnes, Hilda Bayley, Faith Celli, Athene Seyler—does not every name recall a play, an evening, a joy, and—an appreciation of the work done in Gower Street?

The Academy, already incorporated, has at length—and rightly—decided to seek the Royal Charter, in order to absolve the theatre from the accusation that it allows itself to be treated as a Cinderella. The Schools of Music in London are distinguished by the King's grant. The Drama, the greatest of all educational powers, has hitherto sought in vain the hall-mark which, at any rate to the public at large, means "recognition." But the record of the Academy warrants that henceforth it shall be considered as one of the approved educational powers in the same degree—if not by the same methods—as the Conservatoire of Paris. For, although it is not claimed for the Academy that it can make actors—the thing impossible when there is no intuitive gift—it has certainly proved that tuition is the mainspring of development, and that the route "Gower Street-Theatre Land" is a fairly short cut towards "Success." And let me, in conclusion, add this anent the practical result of such teaching as is given at the Academy—I quote the words of the Director of the National Drama School of Holland,

which is a much older institution than ours. He said : " In a profession overcrowded it is a sad law of necessity that even the talented ones sometimes remain by the road-side, whereas by a game of chance the lesser-endowed get on. For the former there is this consolation. One who has earnestly studied at the Academy has learned to use his brain, his body, his limbs : he has tested the many-sidedness of life as expressed in plays ; his horizon has become widened ; he is equipped to take his rank in any walk of life as a somebody generally well-informed." This is a passport which the fewest schools can furnish, for at a Dramatic Academy the student is in daily touch with the greatest school of all—the school of intelligence, emotion, imagination, vitality, which is life itself.

CHAPTER XIX.—July 31st, 1920.

The late Empress Eugénie and the Theatre.

THOMAS JOHNSON, the French journalist with the English name, who for many years represented the *Figaro* in London, and who was incidentally the founder, with Alexander Teixeira, Jules Magny, Georges Petilleau and myself, of the Foreign Press Association of London, was a strange mixture of democrat and aristocrat. He boasted, after some thirty years in England, that he could not speak a single flawless sentence of English, and at the Café Royal he daily presided over an *apéritif*-table at tea-time, where Hector France, the novelist, Rasetti, editor of the *Courrier de Londres*, Henri Rochefort, the Communard of the *Lanterne*, and Pilotelle, the illustrator (when the latter two did not quarrel, which was intermittently the case) loudly debated the events of the day in the most uncompromising manner. In the evening he often went to the Royalty when French plays were in season, and, according to his relations with the renowned impresario, G. L. Mayer—the father of Gaston, who, I hear, has just sold the Court to J. B. Fagan—he throned in the best box or fulminated from the pit against play and players. On Sundays he either held court at No. 410, Fulham Road—a little treasure-house of knick-knacks and pictures, every one of which, according to the boast of Mme. Johnson, was a gift from a grateful artist—or he went to the Court of Eugénie at Farnborough.

Eugénie had a *penchant* for the trim, vivacious little Frenchman, who looked a Lord Lonsdale in miniature, with the elegance of a Beau Brummel; and sometimes she appeared on his arm in public at a concert, or at the French Exhibition in Earl's Court. She would have loved to go to the theatre, too, but somehow her perennial mourning for Napoleon III. forbade that pleasure. Only once was she seen at the Coliseum, about seven years ago, and then I think I was the only one present who "spotted" her when she applauded Yvette Guilbert, for whom she had great admiration. On that occasion she occupied a stage box, for which she paid, unrecognised, at the office, and was accompanied by an elderly lady of her Court. When Yvette had recited, as an

encore, "Les Cloches de Nantes," she rose, clapped her hands enthusiastically, threw a flower on the stage, and slipped out of the box. I wonder whether Yvette ever knew who was the venerable lady in black who, leaning on her stick, paid her a truly imperial homage. I wonder also what the late Empress felt when she had listened to a poem of Prosper Mérimée in Yvette's inimitable diction. For when Eugénie was still Mlle. de Montijo, and not over-blessed with worldly goods, there was some plan that she should become an actress. Prosper Mérimée, the author of "Carmen," and a great friend of the family, believed in her talent and made her appear in a private performance of Musset's "Caprice," which was such a success that a great future was predicted for her. But Fate willed it otherwise. Soon afterwards she met Napoleon, and the rest is history.

Yet her devotion to the theatre never flagged, and both at Compiègne and at the Tuileries there was not only open house to artists, but there were performances in which the Empress herself took leading parts. With Augier, Dumas *fils*, Daudet (whose youngest son was one of the mourners at Farnborough the other day) and Count Walewski (themorganatic son of the First Napoleon, who wrote a play, "The School of the World," which was a "frost" at the Comédie Française), with Auber as musical adviser, and Octave Feuillet, her favourite author (why does no one revive his "Sphinx"?) as "general manager," she established a kind of Court Theatre which was unique in the artistic world. Feuillet even wrote a play for her, in which she was not very good—as she said herself. It was called "The Portraits of the Marquise," and those who remember it declare that there was not much to choose between the play and the chief player. As a kind of *revanche* she appeared in a revue entitled "The Life of Cæsar," something between a skit on and an apotheosis of Napoleon III.'s life study, Julius Cæsar. For this gorgeous spectacle the whole Court was laid under contribution. Marquis de Massa was the author; and the most famous women of the Second Empire, from Mme. de Metternich to Mme. de Pourtalès, took part in it, and the little Napoleon IV. was the centre of attraction in his grenadier uniform. Anon she erected an open-air theatre called the

“Théâtre des Fleurs”—a kind of sequel to Marie Antoinette’s theatre—where the masterpieces of the Watteau period were rendered in splendour by ladies of quality and of the stage.

In her heyday Eugénie was practically a daily visitor to the Opera, and it was on the way to the gala performance of Ristori, her favourite actress and personal friend, that Orsini’s bomb created panic and bloodshed. In his remarkable book, “Les Femmes du Second Empire,” Frédéric Lolié often refers to the Empress as a protectress of the arts, and from it we gather that she was not only an omnivorous reader, but a fair and liberal judge. Indeed, so great was her belief in poetic license, that she preserved her friendship for Alphonse Daudet, although his book, “Les Rois en Exil” must have caused her much heartburn; and she spared no effort during her reign to attract Dumas *filis* to her *cénacle*, in spite of her knowledge that he harboured but little respect for the Third Napoleon, and had ridiculed him in a murderous quatrain.

Of the life at Camden House, at Farnborough, the outer world heard but little. Thomas Johnson, however, told me that a well-known French library—I think it was Rolandi’s—had a standing order to supply her with all the new works of the literary grandes of France, except the “naturalists,” whom she could not bear; and that whenever a French author of Royalist-Imperialist convictions visited London, he would receive, through his (Johnson’s) intermediary, a delicate invitation “*pour prendre le thé*,” at the Court of the ex-Empress. He also indicated, when he once discussed Sarah Bernhardt’s one and only dramatic effort (the title of which was, if I remember well, “*Ceci tuera Cela*”), that Eugénie, besides a volume of “*Mémoires*,” had written a play “round” the last hours of the Empire and Dr. Evans the dentist. But when I urged him to ascertain it, he adjusted his monocle in that peculiar way of his and said, “You might as well ask me to open a safe with my fingers. Unless she lets fall a word of her own accord, the events previous to her flight were never referred to: did she not declare once and for all, ‘the Empress Eugénie died on the night she left the Tuileries’?”

CHAPTER XX.—August 7th, 1920.

"Tombstones." *Grand Guignol.*

EVERY Thursday the *Daily Telegraph* brightens and saddens my comfortable after-breakfast hour. For it is the day of the "dramatic page," with its well-informed comments on current and coming events, the essays of Mr. W. L. Courtney, the occasional signed contributions of the new dramatic critic, whose freshness and independence are full of promise ; and in contrast to all this brightness—its tombstones. It sounds somewhat cryptic, but a word of explanation will suffice. Side by side with the articles there are two lists of professional cards—on the left the ladies, on the right the men, many of them announcing where they are engaged, more of them announcing, by the words "at liberty," or by an address, that for the time being they are out of work. At the first glance, there is nothing mournful in these advertisements, but to the constant reader, to those familiar with the demand and supply of the Theatre, the frequent recurrence of the same names, with "at liberty" attached, means a desert of forlorn hopes, anxious waiting, spoilt illusions. Hence my appellation of the "tombstones," for many of these artists have had their place in the sun, and for reasons unaccountable, except that our Theatre is more based on chance than on system, they are left behind, and others, perhaps less gifted or experienced, but more lucky, have superseded them. There is another side to this question : Why are so many actors of the second or third plane, with experience at their command, unemployed, when the smaller provincial companies are so badly equipped that one wonders at the patience and leniency of the audiences? I have lately seen about a dozen provincial companies visiting wealthy sea-side resorts of between twenty to thirty thousand inhabitants with plays that at one time or other have made great hits in London. These companies were generally headed by a leading man or woman of fair repute and ability, but in the rank and file not a name was to be found which the assiduous London playgoer could vaguely remember, and, generally, not an interpretation worthy of anything but a shrug of the shoulders

or silent commiseration. Indeed, I have seen acting so incredibly incompetent, so wholly lacking in intelligence, let alone distinction, emotion, or humour, that I asked myself who is more to blame, the actor, the manager—both he who forms the company and he who exploits it from town to town—or the audience which week after week applauds such dire exhibitions?

Fortunately, owing to the betterment of salaries, enforced by the praiseworthy energies of the Actors' Association, touring in smaller towns is no longer what it was, and it may be anticipated that the imminent increase in railway fares will drive a deathly nail into the system and herald a new era. The time is near, and I would be among the first to prophesy it, that every English town will have a theatrical company of its own, not necessarily maintained by rates, but commercially worked by an astute manager, who begins to learn that "sharing-terms" are not an unmixed blessing, because they lead to the acquirement of many "a pig in the poke"; that—notably at the sea-side—the competition with bands and cinemas becomes more and more difficult. That it can be done has been proved not only in Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, and anon in Nottingham, but in lesser cities such as Plymouth, Huddersfield, and, from time to time, in Brighton. It is not quite to the point even to repeat "The drama's laws the drama's patrons give," nor is it a sound argument to aver that since the smaller cities are content with the state of things, why change it? They are not content: the "gentry"—I have observed their ways—hold aloof, never go to the *local* theatre; the rest of the population meekly accept "half a loaf." They would all welcome and support a man with energy and insight, alive to the fact that a good theatre is as much a vital necessity as a good band or a palatial picture palace. Here, then, is an open door for new enterprise, and for clearance of the "tombstones." For permanent provincial theatres will do away with the contempt in which touring is held by many actors, who prefer to rest and to rust instead of rushing about in discomfort from pillar to post without the remotest chance of enhancing their experience and their reputation. The very names of John Drinkwater and William Rae, whose fame

began at Birmingham, speaks volumes for the possibilities of provincial theatres.

So the Little Theatre is to become London's Grand Guignol, under the direction of Mr. José Levy. He is the right man in the right place; for in his co-operation with the regretted Louis Meyer he developed a peculiar *flair* of what the public wants. He has often found in Paris plays which make no particular stir, which remained unobserved by the ubiquitous speculator, agent, or manager. These, letting the sleeping dog lie, he ear-marked, and after a time secured at very reasonable terms, to mould them into a great London success, à la "The Glad Eye." That there is room in London for a "*spectacle coupé*"—that is to say a programme of many items—cannot be disputed. It will prove the Mecca of the late diners who hate to rush the liqueurs and cigarette because the theatre begins at eight-thirty. If only Mr. Levy could revive in London the charming old vaudeville-theatres of the Second Empire, when the audience sat at little tables, smoked, sipped long drinks and enjoyed the wonderful little plays of the Labiches and Meilhacs, and the delightful, witty operettas in one act by Adam and Offenbach! But there is one thing I hope Mr. Levy will not make of the Little Theatre in imitation of Grand Guignol—namely, a Chamber of Horrors. We all like a thrill—although a trill of laughter is ever so much more stimulating—a "punch"—in fact, a real little drama in one act perfectly acted. But when I think of the nightmares I have seen, and afterwards been haunted by, in the Grand Guignol—when I read the other day that the play was so gruesomely realistic that ladies yelled and fainted—I pray that Mr. Levy will use his discretion, and remember that if Paris may swallow a camel, and digest it light-heartedly, as "*blague*," London audiences, on the whole, prefer not to be harrowed. Our public is not averse to being moved—aye, to shedding a tear—but it generally will have none but a happy ending. Thus let us hope that, under Mr. Levy's guidance, the Little Theatre will not become a Grand Guignol in the acquired sense of its title, but a fountain-head of pathos, wit and humour.

CHAPTER XXI.—August 14th, 1920.

"Brown Sugar." Finds.

BROWN SUGAR," by the late Lady (Arthur) Lever, is, thanks to Mr. Léon M. Lion's enterprise, a great success at the Duke of York's—and thereby hangs a pretty little tale.

Although I knew nothing about "Brown Sugar" until it was sent me for perusal by the author, I am, in a sense, the spiritual father of the little comedy. It came about this way. Lady Lever's first essay was produced at a Vaudeville *matinée*, and it was not a success. I forgot the title, but I remember that it was an ambitious play in which feminine emancipation was a main point, and that it was as full of thoughts as of faults. With great sorrow—for I love to encourage the newcomer—I wrote what the theatrical world calls a "slater." Now, as a rule, unfavourable criticism does not make for friendship, but in this case the exception ousted the rule. Lady Lever wrote me a charming letter, endorsing most of my strictures, and expressing the wish that I would advise her how to improve her technical equipment as a playwright. Without hesitation, I mentioned the name of Mr. Léon M. Lion, a versatile actor, a producer of originality, a playwright of achievement and even greater promise. He was not then a manager—his career in a few years in all directions has been almost phenomenal. His "Chinese Puzzle" made his name in his four-fold capacity—author, actor, manager, producer. Well, I brought Mr. Lion and Lady Lever together, and after a little while she told me, in high glee, that under his guidance she made great strides, and that she was "bubbling over" with plots for new plays. Would I read "Brown Sugar"? I did, and I found indeed a remarkable advance, although I was not quite sure of a success. I still advised the "Escoffier touch" of collaboration. What happened then to the play I do not know, for Lady Lever succumbed to her devotion to the country. She was paid posthumous *hommage* by Mr. Lion, who had become her loyal guide, philosopher, and manager.

"Brown Sugar," as it stands now, has undoubtedly gone through the refinery since I read it first, and is a credit to the memory of Lady Lever and whoever applied the finishing polish of experience. It is

the sort of play that appeals to all sorts and conditions of men who dearly love a lord, and make a cult of the Gaiety Girl—in fact, to the great healthy multitude to whom romance is the sunshine of life—the very thing that was needed in the late terrible month of July, when “Brown Sugar” came to light. As is his wont, Mr. Lion has manned the play to perfection, and four individual performances will linger in memory : the lord of Mr. Eric Lewis, a delightful old man of the world ; his august spouse, of Miss Henrietta Watson ; the haughty, noble spinster of Miss Margaret Halstan ; and the chorus lady *in excelsis* of Miss Edna Best, the young ingénue who has made so swift and miraculous a conquest of London—such a conquest, indeed, that it cast all the new American reputations temporarily into the shade. Nor is the explanation far to seek. The rise of this fresh, vivacious, blonde, emotional girl is, above all, due to her youth, which is quite imperceptibly allied to experience, and then to two facts which observant playgoers are not slow to recognise. Compared with all the other ingénues, English or American, who are popular, Miss Edna Best has this advantage : she displays none of that obviousness, that conscious assurance, which is the fault of the American ingénue, and—forgive me for saying it—she is much younger than our own heroines, who naturally wish to remain ingénues so long as there is no competition in the field. Miss Best’s success is indeed gratifying, for it is the success of adolescence. Now let us hope that her little knowledge of the stage and all its works may not become a dangerous thing.

During my recent peregrinations in the provinces, to which I alluded in a former chapter, I have not harvested mere Dead Sea fruit. No, indeed : I have made a lucky haul—a play, a new comedian, a character-actress, a trio which I wish to commend to the managers of London. *Place aux dames!* First, the new character-actress. Her name is Marie Royter—she has done fine things under Miss Horniman in Manchester—but alas ! London wots it not. I think she also has had a part in the Metropolis, but not one to show her powers. I saw her in a play I do not love—“Daddy Long Legs.” It is too sugary for me. Yet

Marie Royter, playing the girl, moved me, old stager, to the verge of tears. She has that peculiar form of countenance which is the privilege of the Danes. She might be a twin-sister of Mlle. Genée, the famous dancer; she creates a poetic atmosphere; she is slightly eerie; she is individual; I thought of "Nora" and of the "Lady from the Sea," and more kindred parts. And I forgot the Family-Heraldry of "Daddy Long Legs" in the personality of Marie Royter. She is the type of actress that will hold an audience by sincerity and personality.

As for the play, which made me "laugh more consumedly" than I have laughed for a long time in the theatre, it was "Biffy," a farce by Vera Beringer (pseudonym, Henry Seton) and William Ray, which the former and Jimmy Glover, of Drury Lane fame and popularity, are promenading along the coast. It is so funny that to give the idea away is almost to spoil it. Just a *souçon*: Two middle-aged married boys in the provinces have their little flirtations in town—a French girl who appears and an English one who doesn't—and to cover up their rather frequent trips to London they invent a partner—"Biffy." A clever *chevalier d'industrie* spots the idea, and comes to the home of one of the partners impersonating the non-existent Biffy. As the little Française arrives at the same time, and as these two appearances cause a big tower of little fibs to totter, one can imagine how a born humourist like Vera Beringer makes things hum. It is, except a little halting in the third act—easily remedied by excision—so sparkling, droll, and breathless that the Palais Royal writers could not beat it. As a farce it is a real feather in the cap of the authors, for rarely has the old story of conjugal escapades been told with so much new and inoffensive zest as in "Biffy." Now the real hero of the play is the aforesaid swell-mobsmen who impersonates Biffy, and the actor who plays the part is entirely new to me—Tom Shelford. He may have done big things before, but not in London. I think if some manager of light and leading could see "Biffy" and spot Mr. Shelford, he would soon shine in the front rank of extra-dry comedians. In aspect he looks somewhat—very distantly—like George Grossmith. His manner is that of the cool cucumber, germane to Charles Hawtrey's, but otherwise; perhaps he has a touch of the popular Mr. Nevil Maskelyne

when he explains his mysteries and his innocence. At any rate, these allusions to affinity will somewhat explain Mr. Shelford's methods. He makes you laugh without effort; he whets your interest in what he is going to do next. When he has done playing the adventurer he will make an ideal Sherlock Holmes.

Before taking leave of "Biffy," which I look forward to seeing and enjoying once more when (and if) it comes to London, I would give a "*mention honorable*," as they say at the Conservatoire in Paris, to Mlle. Iris de Villiers, who plays the little Montmartreuse deliciously, with that delectable French accent which makes the most ordinary things sound comic. She, too, deserves her little place in the sun of London—and if he happens not to be there (as often is the case) she will bring him with her.

CHAPTER XXII.—August 21st, 1920.

The Lyceum. "At the Villa Rose."

LET me see the people's play on the people's day," I said to Mr. Hammond, the courteous manager of the Lyceum. What does it matter what the regular first-nighter thinks of "My Old Dutch"? He "don't count" on this occasion; it is the opinion, the emotion, the appreciation of the Saturday-half-holiday-man I want; he is a better judge of the play and of our coster laureate than all the rest of us—for he knows; and he brings to the theatre not only familiarity with the scenes, but an unsophisticated state of mind as ready with a pit-a-pat heart as with laughing lips.

It was a grand sensation. Aloft and below masses of people ready and eager to enjoy themselves to their hearts' content and to pay tribute to one of our truly great actors—Albert Chevalier. It was not only the applause that betokened intimacy between player, play, and public. It was the wonderful silence in the house when pathos reigned supreme; the wonderful unity of laughter at the right moment, as if ordained by a scout-master; the wonderful and eerie rustle of countless handkerchiefs in the infirmary and workhouse scenes, when all looked grey for poor Coster Joe and his sweet wife; when he cheered her with a "cooked" letter from the boy; when even the more hardened playgoer felt a queer, hot feeling round eyes and neck—for, after all, there is a kind of sentiment so natural to the core that you cannot resist it, although you have heard and read it a hundred times. The charm of "My Old Dutch" is that it rings true, save in one note which, if I were the author's counsellor, I would have speedily remedied. Why should these dear costers be ashamed of themselves, and when the windfall came, educate their son in ignorance of his parentage? It is not consistent—indeed, it casts a little slur on Joe and Sal, taints them with a kind of snobbery altogether foreign to their part of the world; nor is it necessary for the action. The boy could have spent his money just as well if he knew whence it came—in nine cases out of ten that is what he would have done if the inclination were there. Curiously enough, the great public perceived this not; so engrossed were they in the main theme that

they overlooked the little stumbling-block—the only one in the play. For the rest, it is a splendid specimen of melodramatic folklore, if I may so call it ; and in some of the domestic scenes the picture is so realistic, in the artistic sense of the word, that one feels as if one were in the midst of these simple folk whose parlance is as sincere as their accent. It would be a great gain to our stage if Mr. Arthur Shirley, the Dennery of England, a man of a hundred dramas and much talent, would devote himself to plays of the people—the field is vast, untilled, and full of possibilities. Strange that of its character, “ My Old Dutch ” is unique on our modern drama. Our plays of the people “ yon East ” are rarely beyond the compass of one act, and then frequently the first fling of a beginner.

Albert Chevalier remains what he has ever been—that rare combination of an artist and a virtuoso, and but rarely does the latter attempt to score off the former. He has little mannerisms—he loves in pathetic scenes to linger over words and “ business ” ; but so complete is his mastery of craft that even his pauses are fascinating in their resonance of tone or their picturesqueness of gesture. As a comedian he is ever sure of his effect, yet, although he has played Joe hundreds of times, he never becomes obtrusively prominent. In pathos he is equally discreet. He speaks volumes with his countenance. He holds his hearers by piano intonations, never by vociferation. For aught we know, he may be calculating every nuance of the part ; but to us he conveys but one idea. He seems detached from us ; he does not act ; he conjures up before our eyes a vision of the East End of London, and he lives it as if the play were life itself. In Miss Alice Bowes he has a splendid *alter ego* ; she has a voice as caressing as music, and, like Albert Chevalier, she marks the periods of the play in wig and features in a manner so perfect that one doubts whether the same artist really marks the march of the times. In a cast which includes such well-known actors as Mr. John Beauchamp and Mr. Charles Fawcett there were many unnamed artists who loyally helped to vivify the local colour. The dance at the Welsh Harp, Hendon, a mere *tableau vivant*, with its be-plumed donahs and its be-pearled costers, was a revel of rare intensity.

It was the kind of preface that rightly attuned the mind to the "World's Love Story," which is "My Old Dutch."

"I wonder." And, like old Demetrius in "The Red Lamp," I closed the book of "At the Villa Rose" and went to see the play. I went with little expectations. I like A. E. W. Mason as a mind, as a man, as a novelist; but (and my admiration warrants candour) I did not like the novel of "At the Villa Rose." As a detective story I found it unskillfully constructed; as a description of French C.I.D. methods I found it absurd. I have studied too much Macé and Goron, the real article, and Gaboriau's fiction, not to smile at the methods of the great Hanaud—in the novel.

But the play, as the French say, is another pair of sleeves. It is by no means an ideal play of the kind. The first two acts are laboured; the last is so superfluous and so beautifully mounted—oh, that vision of the Lake of Geneva in moonlight!—that one feels sorry for all that loss of craft and good money. With a little skill the happy ending could easily occur in the third act, which is the making of the play. It is not only a splendid specimen of melodramatic tension, but it is also a grand opportunity for Mr. Arthur Bouchier to display his *savoir-faire* and ingenuity. It would be unfair to Mr. Mason to say that the actor made the act, for the act is, in its steadfast gradation towards the climax which brings the culprit to the guillotine, a forcible one. But Mr. Bouchier does all he can to kindle our interest, to humanise the detective, to equip him with countless touches which subtly heighten the excitement. Like a busy bee he flits through the room, aimlessly, as it were, touching things here and there, inspecting corners, lifting chairs, sniffing at cushions, sidling up to people, passing a gentle hand over them, then again sniffing; or he suddenly turns on one of the characters as if he had to impart a great discovery, or he pats one on the back in all too obvious benevolence—in fact, he is never still. And in the end we discover that all these seeming quips and pranks are part and parcel of a system. He bamboozles the murderer and his accessories into surrender—not expressed by words, but indicated by gestures

and guilty faces. In Mr. Bouchier's record the great Hanaud will rank very high, as will the French maid of Miss Hutin Britton in hers. She makes a sinister figure of this exceedingly well-drawn criminal character. She looks black like grim death, and she acts it. We have so very few tragédiennes that it seems opportune to ask whether Miss Hutin Britton should not point her ambition in that direction—Lady Macbeth, for instance. At times, when Miss Britton displayed the mental struggle of the guilty maid, I thought of the Dagger Scene. With her husband, Matheson Lang, as Macbeth, it would be an experiment full of possibilities. After which hint I beg to offer a compliment to the other principal actors in "At the Villa Rose," especially Miss Frances Wetherall, who was splendidly characteristic as the young-old victim of the murder; and Miss Kyrle Bellew, who conveyed long-suffering without becoming lachrymose.

CHAPTER XXIII.—August 28th, 1920.

Haidée Wright. "The Unknown."

OF Haidée Wright I will sing the praises. It is not the first time. Oh dear, no. I have sung them long before her first real revelation in "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," Jerome's poetic flight towards "the Unknown," long before her second blooming in "Milestones." She captivated and captured me when she was scarcely known otherwise than as Mr. Huntley Wright's sister; and the part which made me exclaim, "A real artist!" was so small that I forget both play and character. But what I never forget, what led me to prophesy her "Tag" to her before its dawn broke a long dark vigil of hope and despair, was the wonderful timbre of her voice, the exquisite chiselling of her diction, the intelligence with which she penetrated every word of her part. There is in this tiny person a subdued power of personality which, not even released to the full, dominates the atmosphere. She impels you to listen, to drink in her words, to weigh them as she has weighed them, not to let them fleet as a fragment of conversation, but to retain them as something that matters. Mr. Maugham's latest play, "The Unknown," is by no means a monumental affair of one character to the aloofness of all others. Far from it—rarely has a playwright in one play created so many parts that individually bear so much dissection and—so much criticism. Yet the salient figure remains Miss Haidée Wright's *Mater Dolorosa*, and that in spite of an *ensemble* so distinguished and so truly attuned that few plays could boast of better defenders.

What is it, then, that exalts Haidée Wright and carries an audience away in such enthusiasm that in the middle of an act the action is held up for many seconds by countless pairs of hands? I could summarise it in the simplest words. She acts with heart and soul—that is, with appreciation of technical effect, but above all, with inwardness of vibration translated by a voice which seems to be able to render all chords except those requiring fortissimo. There is no need for Haidée Wright to shout: if she had shouted "Who will forgive God?" in the despair of the widow bereft of her two sons by war, she would have been profane,

would have shocked us. All she needs do is to propel the words from pursed lips in a stony countenance, and they hit us right there much more deeply than if they were thundered in imprecation. Haidée Wright's way reminds me of the troubadour who, with his plaintively expressive mandoline and his hushed voice, penetrates the night and fills it with eerie and magnetic charm. In her instrument there are three notes of rare quality—the note of submissiveness, the note of rebellion, the note of maternity ; and the last is the most beautiful of all.

We have at length found in Haidée Wright the motherly woman to express all that maternity means in distinction and restraint. We have actresses who excel in the mother of the people—Haidée Wright is destined to portray her in the higher sphere, and to make her audience feel what she feels with such intensity as she knows how to strain through her being before setting it free.

And now that I have tried to explain, not by mere statement, which is so easy, but I hope by analysis, why I would call Haidée Wright a great actress, although, in the language of posters and paragraphs, her greatness differs from that of others, I would (with great appreciation of the work of Lady Tree, Miss O'Malley, Mr. C. V. France—remarkable as the dying old Colonel—Mr. Basil Rathbone, Mr. Hignett—in fact, of all) say a few words anent Mr. Somerset Maugham's play. In one respect I value it greatly. It is again an effort to rescue our stage from the reproach of emptiness. It makes one think—I would go so far as to say, it makes one angry, which leads to discussion, and implies, therefore, a compliment to the author. Some would also praise him for his audacity. Fancy a man daring to use the stage as a spring-board for anti-religious propaganda (for that is what the young Major and the widow of Miss Wright are indulging in)—how original and how brave! Yes ; but *is* it original and is it brave? Original—no ; for the whole of the endless debate does not produce a tangible axiom which has not been proffered before—I remember even having read somewhere during the war the above-quoted phrase about God, and that the "thought of hell leaves me cold." Mr. Maugham has simply decanted old wine into new flasks and, I fear, in doing so he has added no little water, and in some cases

a fair dram of vinegar. And this brings me to braveness. Is it brave (and fair) to endow the agnostic and the rebel spirit with apparent sense and force of argument, and to depict all the religious folk as narrow, commonplace, and in the case of the clergyman, rather stupid (he asks the hero in presence of the family and his fiancée: "Have you been chaste?"—ye gods and fishes!). That is the worst of plays with religious bases: they always tend to hold the scales unequally, to let transpire which way the author's own wind blows, to give offence by stripping naked *coram populo* certain feelings which most of us would rather leave undiscussed—or, if discussion must be, delicately handled in conclave. Just as Mr. Maugham, the doctor who has rendered such signal services in war, should have remembered that in ordinary life no medical man would allow a debate on religion in the presence of a doomed man, as in this case.

I had great expectations of "The Unknown." The first act, contrived with Mr. Maugham's usual dexterity, created much interest in the development. But we soon found that the discussion, behind which we perceived the author all the time, reached a dead point, whence it rebounded into repetition, to land finally in a dragged-in situation of incredible unreality. The position of the girl who only after *seven years'* engagement began to know her mate, and then gave him up because she believed in God and he did not, after a very indefensible stratagem of hers to lead him to Communion, is not only untenable, it would be ludicrous had it not been played by Miss O'Malley with such reticence and an air of conviction. After that I began to think that Mr. Maugham's purpose in writing this play was to hold up a bone of contention—something that would live by controversy—which, indeed, began a few days in the wake of the first performance, and will rise in temperature after the clerical *matinée* cleverly engineered by one of our contemporaries. But, for all that, I prefer Mr. Maugham in the walks of romance and of humour, when he attacks a subject within his grasp and makes for happiness, instead of causing a flutter in many private dovecotes which had better been left in peace in these days of unhealed wounds and unsettled minds.

CHAPTER XXIV.—September 4th, 1920.

Our Charles.

THERE is but one actor on the English stage—and one only—in whose case there is no yea and nay, but only a chorus in unison, and his name is Charles Hawtrey. Stay!—in the dim and distant past there was one weekly paper and its critic who would not have “C.H.” at any price; chided him as a raw amateur, ridiculed him as an acquired taste, and would have made his life a misery—if the paper had had a larger circulation, the critic a following, and if the public had not from the first taken Hawtrey to its capacious heart. And here, before I go on, I must interpolate a little reminiscence which, in the light of present thoughts, seems amusing, but which at the time added to my bitter cup. For I had produced Ibsen’s “Ghosts” in 1891, and I was the best-abused man in the kingdom. In the period of what the French call my being *conspué* there were to be great doings on the occasion of the opening of Olympia. The directors had an advisory committee to compile the list of invitations to the Foreign Press, and as I represented a leading Dutch paper, my name was on the scroll. But it so happened that the critic who did not like Hawtrey did not like Ibsen; so when the invitations were read off in committee and he heard the name of “Grein” he got up and said, “If the person named is the notorious producer of ‘Ghosts,’ you must prefer my room to my company.” And I was not invited! *O tempora, O mores!*

But to return to the hero of my article. It is a fact that there are no two opinions as to his talent. No one belittles his gifts; no one praises him with a “but”; no one remarks his having been bad in a part; no one can resist his smile. True he is a squire of dames, and he is the darling of all goddesses—did they not jubilate at top voices when he came back after his long illness to gladden “His Lady Friends” at the St. James’s? But he is equally popular among men—everybody’s friend, in the featherweight meaning of the word in English, a real pal to his few elect, and a household word in every club in Bohemia from the Savage to the Eccentric, via the Orléans, which is his headquarters and his arrival the signal for a blare of “Hallo, Charlie!”

As an actor, Hawtrey's first and foremost reputation is that of the consummate prevaricator—the man who has chiselled fibbing into a fine art, and has filed off all its ugly points and corners. Charles Hawtrey telling a story reminds one of the theatrical manager who was so polite that the girl who had an introduction and found no engagement left his room as happy as if she had a contract in her pocket. On his lips the blackest untruth becomes as white as a snowflake. The next great and peculiar quality of his art is his smile. He is a regular sower of smiles—sweet ones, shy ones, winking ones, mocking ones, boasting ones, humble ones, cocksure ones, and crestfallen ones; and he goes nearest to the heart of his hearers when he links the wry, shy smile of embarrassment to a certain *gaucherie* of limb and body which, altogether, forms a rare picture of a gay dog in the comically woeful manger of a difficult situation that amuses no one more than the performer himself.

The average playgoer until lately associated the artist "C.H." with all that meant Palais Royal in London, from Romano's to the Burlington Arcade. To him he was all joy of living, let's live to-day and to-morrow may be hanged!—with distant vistas of private rooms, Justice Eve's Court, alcoves—*enfin*, all the naughty niceties that speed a farce. But he had a rude shock when one evening at the Garrick, in Haddon Chambers' little masterpiece, "The Saving Grace," he discovered another Charles Hawtrey—a comedian always of the greatest finesse, and more telling than most by the seeming unconcern of his method, but also a perfect character-player in that difficult part of Nunkie, easily spoilt by accentuation, and one with a command of pathos so simple, so unaffected, so direct that it moved even weather-beaten old soldiers freshly home from the shambles. The first night was unforgettable, for it revealed a new Hawtrey to us—new and so lovable that we are almost impatient of his pursuing the old gay game in "His Lady Friends."

The secret of Charles Hawtrey's fast and perennial hold on the general public, the critics, the epicures, to say nothing of the fair sex,

is not only one of personality and infinite sense of humour, but his command of the unexpected. I would go as far as to say we know him well, yet we know him not; he is semi-detached from us not only in manner and method, but also in mentality. He will do the most ordinary things in the most prepossessing way, but he will do it otherwise than anybody else. Lately we have been regaled by him with song. *Prima facie*, there is nothing in that. Why should Charles Hawtrey not have a voice as good as any other comedian, although we were not aware of it? Well, he is about to sing, and we all crane our necks and prick up our ears as if a new world were to be revealed to us. Then he chimes in, and we listen to, behold, wonder at something which, whatever musical critics may have to say to it, is strangely fascinating, perplexingly droll. One thinks of the coster's dictum—it is not what he says, it is the nasty (read, cosy) way he says it. The effect is immense; the whole traffic of the stage is blocked for a few moments; he frenzies people. And between the acts all the talk is about "Charlie's song." The comedian has scored tremendously. But anon the man scores even more so. He has an overwhelming reception. Hearts go out to him. All the world wants to make him feel how happy one is that he has come back after long travail of illness in splendid second blooming. There is clamour for speech. He is not acting now. He wishes to convey gratitude. He stands before us a human being akin to all of us when overwhelmed by feeling. With that famous shy smile of his he angles for words. He finds them haltingly at first, then he lets go, and, without affectation, just as if he were talking in emotional intimacy, he pours forth what is in him—simple words of a simple heart, words that go home and let us peep into the inner man. He touches us as he did in that pathetic end of the scene of "The Saving Grace"; only this time the text is all his own, moulded on the spur, under the stress, of the moment. We feel closer to him. He is a great child with the skill of a complete man of the world. We like him better than ever. For his is the touch of nature both in pathos and in humour.

CHAPTER XXV.—September 11th, 1920.

"The Blue Lagoon." Everyman Theatre.

THERE was what we call "atmosphere" in the theatre even before the music of Mr. Clive Carey began to enchant us, or the curtain rose on the scenic wonders of "The Blue Lagoon." For everybody was on tenterhooks; everybody had read the book and loved it; everybody longed to see the play; and everybody, while wishing good luck to the adaptors, Norman MacOwan and Charlton Mann, and the producer, Basil Dean, was a little anxious lest the theatrical form should rend the delicate, imaginative woof of the romantic idyll.

But when the music, eerily appropriate and illustrative, had precluded the disclosure of the deck of the *Northumberland*; when a delightful Paddy—the very Paddy of the book, but not so bibulous—babbled baby-talk to two darling children, not of the stage, but as natural as in the nursery; when we glanced at the ship, a craft which in her very design spelled adventure, we felt easier in the impression that for a start the book had been very charmingly translated to the stage. Then came the fire-alarm, the wonderful, awful foundering of the wreck, the even more marvellous expansion of the sea—a sea as infinite of horizon as ever stage has reproduced. At length, the island, just as we had seen it in the pages: an earthly Eden, beautifully painted withal, albeit that the foliage of the giant trees was a little tawdry and not quite in harmony with the stems, the mossy grass, and the blue lagoon. Meanwhile the children and the old skipper chatted on gaily, as if the great adventure were a mere holiday-trip, and all went well until the old fellow ate the fatal berries and died a death so painfully natural that its realism sent a thrill through the house. Mr. Edward Rigby's performance in its rapid transit from sheer comedy to dramatic climax, and the charm of the children, Madeline Robinson and Leonard Hibbs, roused the enthusiasm of an audience which was already in love with the play, the players, and the pictures.

But now came the great test. How would the eight years that had lapsed reincarnate Dick and Emmeline? How would the adaptors

handle that exquisitely tender scene of love's awakening, that scene which began with Em's blow and ended in a kiss heralding a new life? How would the romance end—tragically, as in the book, or happily, so as not to cloud a perfect evening in gloom? The grown-up Emily and Dick of Miss Faith Celli and Mr. Harold French had a somewhat hard task. For in their case simulation had to follow reality. The children were real children, and our adolescents in the play were in real life accomplished artists of experience. Mr. Dean, the producer, added to their difficulties by letting them recite their parts in incantation in order to indicate the slow development of their minds in the solitude of the island. This was, I think, an error, for the dialogue nowise proves that these two attractive mortals were backward—on the contrary, they expressed themselves in most excellent English, and Em's invocation of the Great Stone Man that he should bless her with child was almost as hallowed as a prayer.

However, both Faith Celli and Harold French filled the picture poetically—a picture of youth, chasteness, and romance. They forgot themselves; they never forgot that this was fairyland, living in the imagination but beyond the touch of the hearer. When, anon, they will be allowed to “sing as they are beaked,” in their own voices, their portrayal will entirely harmonise with the author's fantasy. In the kissing scene, contrived by the adaptors with a delicate touch of unobtrusive indecision, their acting was idyllic beyond words. It was as inwardly passionate as it was guileless in aspect.

At the end of the play, which brought Dick's father to the island under the guidance of the Captain of the *Northumberland*, and made them find the young couple in the bliss of rocking their baby, the adaptors avoided one great pitfall. One was naturally afraid of explanations—the humour in us made us think of: “Have you got a strawberry mark on your left arm—then I am your long-lost father.” Fortunately, nothing of the sort happened. When the father and the Captain espied the happy trio, they said: “Let us not disturb them now—later—later.” Then the curtain gently descended, and the rest was left to us—and we were all very happy.

Now, having read this pæan of joy, you will ask whether the book has made a really good play? For once I would beg that question; or, if I must reply, I would say: No, not a good play in the technical sense of the word, but a delightful entertainment, so picturesquely framed (bravo! Basil Dean), so skilfully vitalised from printed pages, so artistically interpreted by the actors, and—let it be confirmed by more competent musical judges—so graphically intermezzoeed with music breathing the voices of Nature, the elements, or fairyland, that criticism is disarmed by the recollection of things beautiful. For this reason, for the cause of the cult of the beautiful, I hope that “The Blue Lagoon” will attract London and all its visitors. If there were a fair holding of the scales in the fate of the theatre, “The Blue Lagoon” should live as long as “Chu-Chin-Chow.” But, whatever the future of the play, it cannot be denied that its production is a feather in the cap of Reandean, and that it will induce the multitude not only to go to the Prince of Wales’s Theatre, but to read a book that lifts the mind as by aircraft above the workaday world to regions of romance.

I don’t know whether Norman McDermott, the founder of the Everyman Theatre, is a Scotsman, but he deserves to be. I met him first at Liverpool, where he was popular in the Playgoers’ Society, and often exhibited scenic designs of his own with which he hoped to revolutionise or reform existing stagecraft. He had great plans for the conquest of London, but no sinews of war. During the war I met him again, full of enthusiasm and greater plans—the material side still remained undiscovered. Then two years ago he heralded the advent of the Everyman Theatre, which was very much taken up by the Press, and promised great things in a temporary building at Golder’s Green—provided the money was forthcoming. A prospectus was duly issued: it contained an ambitious programme, and the names of 13 (or was it 31) directors; more Press notices and promises—and—silence. But our young director was not to be beaten. He minded neither time nor trouble nor disappointment. He went on working hard, selecting plays, collecting money, rallying actors round his banner, seeking a place whence to lead

off, perhaps less loftily than from Golder's Green, but more securely. And he found what he wanted; the money to begin; the Drill Hall opposite Hampstead Tube Station as a home; actors like Agnes Thomas, Muriel Pratt, Bramber Wills, Nicholas Hannen (these names "talk" in repertory), and plays—plays in such multitude that he starts on September 15th with one by the Spaniard Benevente, and then will traverse the modern work of many lands to come home to roost among English classics, such as "The Knight of the Burning Pestle."

So far, all's well. The rest depends on the man at the tiller and the people at the till. The lower-priced seats are cheap enough, but I have fears of 7s. 6d. for a stall in a hall, when you can be luxuriously fauteuiled in palatial district theatres for very much less. If Norman McDermott is open to a little hint, let him issue season tickets at a much-reduced price. A goodly subscription list means backbone, and has been the making of many theatres *à côté*, including our own Stage Society.

CHAPTER XXVI.—September 18th, 1920.

Millie Hylton. Thrills and Trills.

THE last years of Millie Hylton were a long and tenacious struggle with death. She had at length reached the real road of fame, and she hoped that the end, though in sight, would be long to reach. I remember her deep solicitude concerning her daughter, Millie Sim, and her own future when, shortly after her great success in Knobloch's "Marie-Odile," the doctors sprang an immediate and grave operation upon her. She knew that it was a case of life or death; she was prepared, yet mortified; she made me think of Cecil Rhodes' last words: "So much to do, so little done." I felt that she would survive and enjoy the new lease of comparative health. But somehow, although she knew it not, her course was stemmed. The two beacons in her career—the Abbess in "Marie-Odile" and Mrs. Potash, remained unshifted by greater things, and probably the public at large will remember her better in her long career in musical comedy and music halls than as a character actress who came to the fore suddenly, and revealed a depth of pathos and a dignity of style (in "Marie-Odile") which were as impressive as her exuberant humour, her rare understanding of Jewish ways and manners, were astounding and refreshing. When people read that Miss Hylton was cast for a grave part in a nunnery, they smiled and doubted the wisdom of her selection. Had she not hitherto sung and danced herself through the world in the lightest fare; was she not a sister of Letty Lind, whose dainty personality, quaint bird-like gestures, husky voice were the *joie-de-vivre* of the day; were there not four sisters besides Millie Hylton, clever actresses all, and successful in musical comedy? For on our stage the label is as important as in the wine trade. We would never believe that the finest vintage could sparkle in a bottle without a collar. So people went to His Majesty's without great expectations of Millie Hylton, and they came away in slight wonderment. What dwelt uppermost in their minds was the unforeseen, emotional power of Miss Millie Hylton. As I write I can hardly remember what was the subject of her scene that held us so

strongly ; all I recall is a womanly woman pleading a cause so fervently and so inmostly that we felt in presence of a real touch of nature. In that one evening Millie Hylton changed her status. She stood high up in the list for "character" and "mothers." Authors began to think of her specifically for certain parts. She herself dreamed of things to come—the Nurse in "Romeo and Juliet" was one of her cherished ambitions ; and she meant to go deeper into Shakespeare—but her forces needed constant husbanding. What she has achieved remains ; the rest lingers unfulfilled in the realm of *pia vota*.

London's Grand Guignol, as Mr. José Levy calls the Little Theatre, has begun its career fairly well. It is likely to become a permanency when the pieces are as uniformly interesting as "The Hand of Death" and when English playlets, of which there is an abundance in waiting, are the main fare. In the present programme three of the four acts were from the French, and at least in two cases the adaptation hardly gave an equivalent of the original. "How to be Happy," by Pierre Véber, demonstrates the very useful lesson that when we are dissatisfied with our lot we should seek comfort in the thought that there are many in a worse plight than ourselves. I can quite imagine that, told by Pierre Véber in the vernacular of the Parisian *faubourg*, the little play laid in a workman's home seemed quaint enough—Véber can be very witty—but in English, and transferred to somewhere across the Thames, it becomes a little tract, rich in homily, but rather mild of entertainment. In this, as in the "G.H.Q. Love"—weird title for a theatrical cloak-room and "offices" in a Parisian theatre—the acting was the main interest. The majority probably never fathomed the inner meaning of "G.H.Q. Love," and those who did found it very strange to see the little mysteries of the *vestiaire*, etc., the *ouvreuse*, and the *piccolo* unveiled in a London theatre. No doubt the Parisians like it immensely, for the cloak-room of the theatre is literally a black cabinet of love-intrigues ; and its presiding genius is somebody in Parisian life—one of them I saw wore the *Palmes Académiques*. But here the whole traffic, from scenery to dialogue,

seemed a little lacking in taste—superfluous but for the magnificent and lifelike queen of the cloak-room—Mama of Miss Minnie Raynor.

The thrill and the decisive moment of the evening came with André de Lorde and Binet's "Hand of Death," one of those dynamic little dramas of which de Lorde owns the secret and monopoly. It is easily said that these plays are sheer melodrama. It would be both an injustice and a misnomer. De Lorde's way is not merely to thrill for the sake of sensation. He is a scientist fond of research and experiment, and he likes to test his theories on the stage. In "The Hand of Death" he holds that electricity applied to the heart after sudden death may cause resuscitation. For the sake of dramatic demonstration, he allows a doctor to practise the theory on his idolised daughter, who was killed in a motor accident. In order to convince his audience that in some cases electricity very nearly succeeded in awakening the dead, de Lorde calls in the testimony of the public executioner, the Monsieur de Paris of to-day, who had dispatched many murderers and witnessed experiments on their bodies. The episode is gruesome, but chastened by Mr. Lewis Casson's restrained description. Then comes the climax and catastrophe. As the doctor directs the battery on the dead heart of his child, her hand clutches and strangles him in *rigor mortis*. Knowing the play, I was wondering how our audience would take it. It was horrible and haunting; yet it was so plausible, all so subtly prepared, that no one seemed shocked and everybody deeply interested, although—and I have this on the authority of a well-known doctor who sat next to me, that strictly, in a medical sense, the end was wrong. *Rigor mortis* no longer functions after hours of death. Here de Lorde indulged in poetic licence, because there was no other issue to the play (had the daughter returned to life, all science would have been angry and up in arms), and because, possibly, he wanted to drive home a symbolic moral: Nature defies human effort. Be this as it may, the success was great, not only for the author, but also for the chief actor, Mr. George Bealby; although all, including Miss Sybil Thorndike, were admirable. Mr. Bealby's performance evoked memories, but no comparison. We thought of Guitry's Pasteur, and many said: "There's the very man

to render him lifelike in English." It was almost incredible that this was the same Mr. Bealby who amused us so as the American officer in the preceding play ; it became almost more incredible anon that he and Miss Sybil Thorndike, in the harmless little *Revue*, " Oh, Hell ! " proved equally adroit in song and dance as in character-acting. His performance of the doctor in " The Hand of Death " is a momentous achievement. It is something more than an impersonation or a portrayal ; it reveals by its manner, by the way technical matters of pathology were uttered, that this was no mere repetition of the producer's precepts. Nor was I astonished when my doctor-friend told me that Mr. Bealby knows something of medical science—is a student. It came out at every point : in the apt make-up of the face ; in sternness of mien ; in gait and gesture ; in discreet reticence when talking of his discoveries. In fine, a powerful, impressive figure which should mean a milestone in the artist's career.

CHAPTER XXVII.—September 25th, 1920.

"The Daisy." "French Leave." "Cherry."

DISCUSSING Molnar, the Hungarian dramatist, in the days when "The Devil" came to London and did not stay long, one of his compatriots said: "He has much talent, but there is a touch of the savage in him." He did not mean that Molnar was uncouth in the ordinary sense of the word, but that he had an archaic mind with eerie visions which he attempts to materialise. Thus, his plays sometimes hover between the realistic and the ethereal, and, as he is not profoundly scientific or poetic by nature, but an exceedingly shrewd and accurate observer of life, he succeeds in the representation of the former and fails in his flights towards the unknown. That is precisely the case of "The Daisy." With a touch as sure and as telling as the chronicles of Hugues le Roux's famous book on the Mountebanks, he depicts the *milieu* and the characters of people of the fairs. We are outside the booths of the merry-go-round, but in description we see its glamour, its fascination, the weird morals of its workers. "The Daisy," well-beloved of all women, handsome, fickle, vain, brutal, yet with the heart of a child; the buxom owner of the show, who would pay him for labour and love; the wanton gambler, in whom there lurk cupidity and crime; the smart servant-girl, who understands life and the value of self-preservation; in contrast, the pale, fair Julia, who forsakes home and birth and fortune because the lure of sex is stronger than duty—all these characters, until they sidle towards the melodramatic, are real. They seem to smell of paraffin and the peculiar fragrance that pervades a fair. When, anon, the flaxen girl has wedded her idol, shares his misery, his hunger, accepts his blows, bears him promise of child; when he, to still the pangs of hunger, is tempted to murder, repents in time, and, in mortal fear of capture, stabs himself with the very knife he stole to kill another, we are in the see-saw between realism and good, strong, old-fashioned melodrama. The characters remain fairly lifelike, but the action becomes fantastic. "The Daisy," as we know him, would have accepted money from his admiring former employer; there was no need for murder. But we forget that, for the tale is dramatically told, and the scene when the

wife caresses the dead body of him whom she loved beyond blows and penury for the sake of coming motherhood, is moving, despite its gruesomeness. Then, suddenly, the superhuman steps in—the Court of the Beyond, where sinners are tried, sentenced to purgatory, and in requital of penance allowed to return to earth to fulfil that which they had left undone. And now we are bewildered: we feel that the author wished to handle something beyond his grasp, that he himself drifted in uncertainty, for the Divine trial fringes on the absurd; and when “The Daisy” comes back to earth to meet his widow and his now fourteen-year-old child, it is not to bring comfort, but to strike his offspring as he struck her mother before. What does it mean? For the life of me I do not know. All I can disentangle with difficulty is that the love of some women is so great that it would endure sufferings in submission, and bear no ill-will against the man who made life a hell yet was the world to her. No doubt the intention is fine, but I wish that it had been more clearly expressed. As it is, we go in wonderment, with some appreciation of the adaptation by Messrs. O. Shillingford and A. L. Ellis, but more puzzled than satisfied. There is nothing but praise for the play’s chief exponents, especially Miss Mary Merrall, whose delicacy of touch is truly wonderful; Mr. Caine, and Miss Susan Sheldon—both realistic and sound.

I shrewdly suspect that Mr. Reginald Berkeley’s delightful comedy, “French Leave,” is not merely a child of fantasy, but that it is founded on facts. Somewhere in the background of my memory there lingers the tale of the young Parisian wife who was so deeply in love with, and lonely without, her husband that when she had discovered his soft billet on the Staff in a *château* somewhere near the firing line, she went there, took the vacant place of housemaid, and surprised her husband at dinner with the offer of “*Du potage, Monsieur.*” It goes without saying that all the other officers fell in love with her, that the husband became jealous and that he took care to send her back to Paris with French leave and great dispatch. (Historical.) Mr. Berkeley has worked a similar theme on more English lines, and he has succeeded beyond the dreams of the joy of living. Here we are in an English happy nook at the front, where

a General of the good old pattern, a Staff Captain up-to-date, and a young blood of the "pippiest" freshness, to say nothing of a humorous corporal and a private, seem to have a jolly good time with a capacious French landlady. Suddenly this dear, hospitable, French body acquires a daughter, as pretty a minx as ever entered a mess-room. She had bribed her hostess to play the part, to give a surprise to her husband. She was quite English, but she spoke French with grace, so for the time being her identity remained undiscovered except by the husband, who was in a great "stew," and watched the overtures of the old General and the amorous young blood with a fierce and jaundiced eye. Before long the fair charmer plunged all her male companions into a mild form of agreeable lunacy, and when the General got at the truth, there was the devil to pay, for there were warnings of a female spy round the camp, and, besides, there was a possibility of a court-martial, as discipline forbade the presence of women in soldiers' quarters under heavy pains. Now the cleverness of the little play is not the creation of the muddle, but its ingenious disentanglement. Rarely has the third act of a farce been brought to so logical a conclusion. And not only that : just towards the end, when the General threatens punishment and the young wife defies him with a threat of exposure of his advances, the author manages to introduce a pretty touch of sentiment which mellows the old warrior, who sentences her to be brought back to Paris under the escort of a trusted officer—her husband. It was all very entertaining, and full of bright dialogue and excellent, in a humorous way, lifelike characterisations of the various soldiers. The acting, too, was perfection. Miss Doris Lytton was a bewitching mock-Parisienne ; the old General of Mr. Morand, the young officer of Mr. Henry Kendall, the Corporal of Mr. Charles Groves were masterly vignettes of military types ; add to these the neat touches of Miss Gladys Dale, Mr. Arthur Cleave, and M. Georges de Warfaz, and there is an *ensemble* beyond reproach. As for the play, it is so vivid and so cosmopolitan in spirit that it deserves to be adapted to the stages of all the Allies and neutrals. It is sure of an international welcome.

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A pretty London Idyll is "Cherry," and Marie Blanche in the leading part is a "divette" as distinguished as our stage has known since Gertie Millar's heyday. Ere long she will get a firm hold as a much sought-after comédienne, for she is richly dowered with grace of personality, with the smile that gladdens, with a fine and commanding voice, with immense *savoir-faire*, and an intelligence which illumines all she does. And doesn't she work hard—not with effort, but with zest—in the right 'Ampstead 'Eath bank-holiday spirit—one of the few manifestations that prove how truly gay London is at heart. What attracted me most in Miss Marie Blanche's acting was not the artistic side, but the human side of her creation of Cherry, the coster-girl who for a brief spell strayed among gentlefolk, and was only too happy to give up the part of the fish out of water. If she has not lived among costers she must be a London pilgrim of rare powers of observation. From top to toe, she is the "donah" of East London's romance, and so inspiring is her gaiety that all her partners, from hero to chorus, fit in the scheme, which is a merry idealisation of an angle of merry life in the old city. Mr. Knoblock's part of the entertainment is all it should be; it is racy of the soil. Not so the music of Mr. Melville Gideon, which is melodious in parts, but rarely echoes the humour and the sentiment of Cockayne.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—October 2nd, 1920.

Leslie Henson. "A Pair of Sixes." Emile Augier

I SHOULD like to head this chapter "Leslie Henson" only, for I could easily write a long article about this delightful comedian. The Grossmith-Laurillard dramatic aviary is full of swallows of both genders who collectively could make summer, but there is only one who could do it quite alone by his little and nimble self, and that is Leslie Henson. When we think of "A Night Out," with a whirl of charming women; of dashing tunes by Willie Redstone, who attunes his British lyre to Parisian gaiety and has some of that diabolical verve of Offenbach; of exquisite dancers like Fred Leslie, Lily St. John, Phyllis Monkman—capital comedians to boot—and Molly Gilmour, with Espinosa—when we recall an evening full of jollity and heaven-knows-where-they-get-it-from absurdity, one little figure towers above the rest in inexpressible variety of ways, means, moods, miens, and manner. At moments he reminds one of the late and still regretted Teddy Payne; but there is a marked difference between the two. Little Teddie was comically pathetic; somehow one always felt that there was a tinge of sadness in his humour: when he was in a scrape, as he always was in Gaiety plays, his anguish and tribulations came very near the real thing, especially in the latter days of his career. Leslie Henson, on the other hand, is—when he is not frankly droll and, like a schoolboy, full of holiday pranks and tricks—pathetically comic. When all the world of fun is against him, when a big wife—capitally played by Stella St. Audrie—haunts him like an avenging angel, when an irate lover threatens violence for a "night out" with his inamorata, when the police lay him by the collar, and the immediate future looks as black as Stephens' blackest ink, we never think, "Poor little devil! How will he get out of it?" We would cry out: "The little demon!" for he makes such quaint grimaces, he wiggles so like a fish on the hook (not that fishes like it, I understand, but it looks funny), he bursts into such weird sounds, and so sprawls with all his limbs, that he creates the make-belief of half-a-dozen comedians instead of one. Nor does he ever flag, relax, or spare himself; during three hours he is nearly always

on the stage, acting, singing, dancing, capering, arranging, deranging, climbing, jumping, sporting—the vocabulary of his ubiquity nearly gives out—as if he were a splendidly organised machine instead of a frail human being. And this physical energy is but one side of his equipment. His brain is as agile as his body. He does not utter a word or a sound without a meaning. If he has what is theatrically called a good “line,” he shoots it at us as from a bow; when he mimics Russian Ballet and the game of golf, he conjures up visions of Nijinski and of irate Colonels who vent their disappointment in big D’s on the wayward ball. When he “gags”—I am sure he does “gag”; no pen could in cold blood write down the things he drags in from nowhere—he sometimes sums up a whole situation or a person in a few words so telling that we would jot them down for patent use in the daily walks of life. In a word, he is a little genius, and, if “A Night Out” should keep the Winter Garden in full bloom for a year to come and more, the lion’s share of the harvest will be due to the art and craft of Leslie Henson.

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“The Luck of the Navy” has followed Mr. Percy Hutchinson across the waters, and he has brought home a new farce which is likely to make London laugh and the provinces even more so. At first I thought that we were going to see a real comedy—that long-looked-for idea, a counterpart to “Potash and Perlmutter” in a Christianised edition. There must be as much fun in Gentile partnership in business as on the Jewish side—only it requires a very clever comedy-writer to distil it, and after the first act the author of “A Pair of Sixes” gave it up, to plunge into a farrago of such laughable nonsense that no one could make head or tail of it. Fancy two partners letting a game of poker decide which of the pair shall become the man-servant of the other, in order to teach both harmony and amity in business. However, good acting goes a long way, and, clever actor as he is, Percy Hutchinson has learned in America the value of dispatch and velocity in farce. He, Mr. Sam Livesey, Miss Jessie Winter—who suddenly blossoms out as a *comédienne* of a caustic vein—play this cock-and-bull

story as if it were a game of football. They work with a will and like Trojans ; they rush about the stage as if panic had stricken them ; they blurt out their wild bits of dialogue as if under pneumatic pressure ; they shout, gesticulate, play tricks, gambol with the irresponsible *abandon* of an amiable lunatic asylum let loose ; they give us no time to think, to analyse, or to criticise ; somehow they laugh and will make us respond—and the result is that people on the stage and people in the house let themselves gaily go, both parties really full well aware that they are “ dashed ” if they know what it is all about.

Emile Augier, with Victor Hugo, Dumas *filis*, Labiche, and Sardou, for many years shared the kingship of the French stage, so it was in the fitness of things that the Comédie Française and the Odéon on Sept. 17 celebrated his centenary by producing two of his most renowned plays, “ Les Effrontés ” and “ Le Fils de Giboyer.” Of the five, Victor Hugo was the leader of romanticism, Dumas of the play “ *à thèse*,” Sardou of the society-comedy—and later of historical melodrama—Labiche of the domestic comedy, and Augier of social satire. The last began as a follower of Hugo, cut adrift, and, in a form which we would call to-day realistic, began to scourge national foibles—now in sarcastic vein, now in the toga of the moralist. To the former phase belong “ Les Effrontés ” (that pungent exposure of journalistic practices which years later, during the Panama scandals, proved even more up-to-date than under Napoleon III.) and “ Le Gendre de M. Poirier,” in which the *nouveaux riches* are taken to task ; to the latter, “ Les Fourchambaults,” often characterised as Greek tragedy in modern guise ; “ Le Mariage d’Olympe,” a violent attack on marital infidelity ; and “ Les Lionnes Pauvres,” a spirited defence of women forced upon “ the easiest way.” It was often said of Augier that he wrote in the spirit of a bourgeois, that he was dry, that he was caustic without being humorous, and he was certainly less flamboyant in style than Hugo, Dumas, and Sardou. But his plays were full of correct observation, and in their frigid, logical survey of his contemporaries they retained an air of reality which prevented them from becoming antiquated,

as so many of the problem-dramas of Alexandre Dumas *filis*. To-day "Les Effrontés" and "Le Gendre de M. Poirier";—in which he had the help of the witty Jules Sandeau—are as fresh as ever, and I believe that translated (not adapted) and played in the costumes of the period, they would greatly interest English audiences. Two little anecdotes will tell more graphically than pages of comment what manner of man was Augier. He had quarrelled with Labiche, that dearest of dear souls, and, in spite of the latter's conciliatory attitude, he, like a true French cavalier, sought vindication by duel. Labiche preferred the pen to the rapier, and made an epistolary effort to let bygones be bygones. But Augier would fight, and then Labiche, who knew that under the rigid breast of the old-régime man there beat a warm heart, sent him a little drawing. On the left a weeping willow under which was written "Here lies Emile Augier"; on the right another, with "Here lies Eugène Labiche"; underneath both, in the middle, "Death reunited them." That did it! Augier took a fiacre, clasped his adversary to his bosom, and the two became fast friends for life. The second anecdote is a specimen of his humour—it might have been transcribed from one of his plays. It must partly be told in French, lest its savour become lost. A comedian wanted to act in one of his plays, and Augier gave him the following letter of introduction to his manager. He wrote: "The comedian who bears this letter says that he is comic. *S'il l'est, remerciez-moi; s'il ne l'est pas, remerciez-le.*" Is it not as significant as Beaconsfield's letter to the young author: "Thank you for your novel: I shall lose no time in reading it"?

CHAPTER XXIX.—October 9th, 1920.

*The Play-Cobbler of Paris. A Noble Play ("The Right to Strike").
More Guignol.*

HAVE you ever heard of the play-cobbler—the man who does for the aspirant dramatist what the little bootmaker does to your soles and heels? It seems a strange *métier*, but there is money in it. I found him in Montmartre, and he said that he had a large *clientèle* and a regular tariff. He was a Dutchman and an ex-actor; in his palmy days he very nearly played Hamlet, but, acting the Ghost of the Prince's father, he became rather too fond of a Dutch national spirit—the *Bittertje*, a liqueur-glass full of gin with a dash of Angostura—and irregular in consequence. When they gradually weeded him out, he continued to live on his wits, in the truest sense of the word. He had plenty of imagination and a miraculous memory. If a touring manager wanted a melodrama, he would write it to order in twenty-four hours; if a farce was required, he asked for one hundred florins for a trip to Paris, and within eight days he was back with the complete text of the latest Boulevard success in his pocket. How did he do it?—for French farces are not often printed, lest they be annexed by American pirates. He had no friends in the Parisian world of the theatre; he had certainly no money to plank down on account of fees. But he had that memory in a hundred thousand. He would go to the theatre once, twice, or three times, and after the third visit he had not only the whole of the *mise-en-scène*, but every line of the play, in his mind, and could jot it down in Dutch ready for production in less than the allotted week of his journey.

Things went well with him until 1911, when Holland joined the Literary Convention and had to pay fees for foreign authors' rights like everybody else. He then struck out a new line, and, with a fair knowledge of French, settled in Paris as a play-cobbler, as he called himself derisively. You could, if you were thirsting for glory, buy from him an entire play, and for a fairly heavy forfeit adorn it with your own name—he did not care so long as you made it worth his while. He had scenarios galore, and to write a play was to him the business of a night

and an extra supply of spiritual oil for his intellectual lamp. But the aspirants were somewhat afraid of this traffic: they feared that, in spite of the old law, "*la recherche de la paternité est interdite*," some day the rightful author might claim his rights and threaten exposure. So he sought a more legitimate trade—he would help the lame, the halting, over the stile. He would teach you your business, write up your scenes, work up your plot, provide logical solutions, supply witty or dramatic dialogue, as the case required—in fact, he would make a playwright of the merest tyro, and turn a sackful of chaff into ripe, profitable corn.

The tariff was curious and instructive. Adjusting a one-act play cost a mere fifty francs, remodelling the first act only one hundred, the second fifty more; but when it came to the third he began to parley—his tariff then grew elastic. "You see, *mon ami*," he would say, "it is the third act that matters. Your play hinges on it. Let the first and second be bad—that does not matter. The third's the thing—*finis coronat opus*" (he was fond of quotations), "and don't forget what old Sarcey said—golden words, sonny. The first was 'The drama is the art of preparation'; the second and most important—'In the third act there must be a scene which crystallises, as it were, the whole conflict—*la scène-à-faire*'—the scene on which everything depends. Now to write such a scene, you must be a born dramatist, not merely a midnight-oil toiler; you must be inventive, imaginative, comprehensive, logical. I am all that, and I wager I can make a decent finale to the dullest of plays. That is worth something, is it not? Now look at your third act—it fizzles out like a tinker's candle; it is dull, inconclusive, there is no climax. I can mend that in half-an-hour—shall we say seven-fifty? No. Well, let it be five hundred—is it a bargain? Good! Wait!" And he would call a typewriter, and in half-an-hour there was a third act that would "knock the nations," as he put it. When the deed was done he would wax eloquent about himself. "Ah, if I could speak! You know So-and-So—his plays are now at the Française. I was his Ghost when he had his first play produced at the Vaudeville; you know that opera—I wrote the third act. The authors are long since dead, else I would not have named their work. But look at this"—and he

showed a sheaf of letters, from the Comtesse X, from Professor G., from an American millionaire. "All my clients, all playwrights—thanks to me. All will be famous—thanks to me. See these *palmes*" (the mauve ribbon of Officier d'Académie), "I got them for making a dramatist of a well-known politician. Oh, yes; I have others. The Christ Order of Portugal, and the State Cross of San Marino—all tokens of gratitude and appreciation—if I could only talk; but I must not—professional secret, you know. Hope that you will be one of my clients. Ever written a play—no? Well, then, you don't know what the joy of living means. I would treat you on the most-favoured-nation terms." I went away like Alice in Wonderland. A little later, I heard that he was found dead in his chair. He left some plays, but not a scrap of paper. He had destroyed all the letters of his *clientèle*—the world should see nothing of how some of its greatest men became great!

"Noble"—yes; Mr. Léon M. Lion chose the right word when, after a memorable production, he applied this word, before the curtain, to Mr. Ernest Hutchinson's play, "The Right to Strike." I for one came away elevated into that indefinable mood which the theatre can create when your whole being has been in action. It had affected me like Greek tragedy, with the difference of a happy ending. It is noble indeed: Strike! The old doctor's son killed by the strikers; there will be a tooth for a tooth—the doctors will strike too! The law may forbid it—but nature is stronger than law. The leader's wife is in labour. Shall she suffer for the cause of her man? "Yes," say the younger doctors. "No," says the stricken father, "I will tend her." But he is old; he dare not perform the supreme operation which may save the woman's life. There is only one who can do it—the young doctor who proclaimed his right to strike, and who was threatened to be struck off the register for his disobedience. But in the end, when the strike is over with compromise on both sides, he too relents. The call of humanity is greater than the cause of man. The play began a little slowly—one felt the novice's hand in the exposition; but thenceforward it unfolded with great power, with a delicate sense of balance. When the doctors

declared a strike there was noise in the gallery—cries of dissent and assent. Towards the end of the play there reigned perfect harmony. The human chord had been struck, and vibrated in unison. We had heard both sides of the question, and the touch of nature had welded them into accord. The acting, too, was true, in the best sense of the word. We saw pictures from life. The agitator of Mr. Léon M. Lion; the young doctor of Mr. Charles Kenyon (terribly touching in his agony when he learned his friend's death); the iron-cast striker of Mr. Lauderdale Maitland; the dry-as-dust yet humorous lawyer of Mr. F. B. J. Sharp; the magnificent company director of Mr. Bassett Roe; the tender father of Mr. Holman Clark; the sweet, bereaved bride of Miss Marjorie Day; yet others and others—they all went to prove what our artists can do under producers who understand life. "The Right to Strike" will rank among the strike-plays of our time; it reaches the power of Octave Mirbeau's famous "Mauvais Bergers" without touching its inherent acerbity and desolation.

Mr. José Levy's fascinating dramatic sandwich at the Little Theatre's Grand Guignol has been freshly spiced with two dainty condiments: a little shocker from the French entitled "The Medium," which recalls a pleasant punishment of Burmah in the old days—the embedding of traitors in a grave of plaster-of-Paris; and a delightful farce by H. F. Maltby, "What did Her Husband Say?" It is a little nocturne: the escapade of a grass-widow with a stranger to whom she gave shelter after a little dinner, when her husband suddenly came home and she was very nearly compromised in a manner which would seem coarse if merely described in a few words. The cleverness of the thing is its variety of incident, its happy morsels of dialogue in true Maltby vein, and the acting of Miss Dorothy Minto, Mr. Jack Farquhar, and Mr. Fred Eastman. One thing is clearly proved by this English addition to the programme. We have the "stuff" at home to keep the Grand Guignol going; and Mr. Levy's first quest in this direction will certainly encourage him to give our own young generation a splendid chance.

CHAPTER XXX.—October 16th, 1920.

Mainly Moscovitch. Chips of our Tree.

THERE must be some distinct difference of focus between the Continental and the British eye, for to my surprise I read constantly concerning Maurice Moscovitch in "The Great Lover"—after consummate praise of his acting—that he is not quite the man of the part in physique; that, in spite of natural disadvantages, he gives a splendid performance—and so forth. Now, from the Continental point of view, Maurice Moscovitch is not only the man of this part *par excellence*—he is the prototype of the heroic actor. He has the knightly, serene appearance, the lofty manner, the broad gesture, the sonorous voice which in my mind's eye stamp all the great performers of the tragic school as members of one family. I see a striking resemblance in dimness of outline between him and Bouwmeister, Haase, Possart, Poliahoff, Sully; he reconstructs, as it were, the period when realism was still on the horizon, and the grand, romantic manner swept the theatres of all Continental Europe. Nor would I be understood to say that Moscovitch belongs to the old school: he has proved in his Shylock and in his far too-little appreciated "Inspector General" that he is wholly original, and has conceptions of his own in defiance of tradition. My contention is that, if ever the right man was chosen for the right part, it was Moscovitch as the Great Lover. There is but one point of criticism to be levelled against his magnificent portrayal of this arch-*cabotin*, who flattered himself into the belief that he was a super-man, who acted on the stage and off, who played with hearts as another plays with cards. The criticism refers to the last act, when the Great Lover wooed and whined to the young girl who, about to yield to his glint and glamour, remembered that she belonged to another. In that scene Moscovitch meandered, and somehow recalled the days when, at the Pavilion East, he played parts of Yiddish tragic comedy. Yet—I am glad to add it—the decline of quality was not quite his fault. He had to play up to a lady who, in my opinion, lacks all the qualifications of the *ingénue*, all the experience demanded by a scene of great emotion. If a different partner had been chosen for him, he would have remained

on the magnificent level of the first two acts ; he would have given the *grand jeu* as he did when sparring with that fine actress Miss Beverly Sitgreaves, the cast-off old love of the occasion, whose creation of the diva fighting sere and yellow and fallen leaves of love, conjured up pictures of *Italia Irredenta*, and of the tempestuous influence of green-room rivalry and the incessant battle of existence in stage life. Here was great, intense, memorable acting on both sides, and the play, obviously intended as satire with dramatic interludes, reached the drama which moves the crowd.

“The Great Lover” (the pity of it that Herbert Tree was not spared to play it : how he would have doted and gloated on the part !) will have a great career—thanks to Moscovitch, who now has given such eloquent proof of his versatility and creative genius ; thanks to an excellent ensemble which rendered the first act in the impresario’s office a Babel, a little inferno, and a live museum of all the wiles of international operatic virtuosity ; thanks, lastly, to the immense dexterity of the author, Mr. Leo Ditrichstein, who, with tongue in his cheek and a lightly-flicking whip in his hand, has retold us what would seem unbelievable if Joseph Schurmann, the famous impresario of Paris, had not given us a human document in “*Les Etoiles en Voyage*” which describes the Kindergarten of the artists and the woes of their director more personally than the comic pandemonium in the first act of “*The Great Lover*.”

I am still engrossed in the delightful Tree book, a biography which is something more than a record and a posthumous portrayal. To me, who knew Herbert Tree so well—we became great friends after a vehement polemic in the Press—it is, in the pages of *Lady Tree*, almost something akin to a resuscitation. I see him ; I hear him ; I laugh with him ; I smile at him ; and—with a vivid stretch of imagination—I dine with him and wine with him aloft in the dome of His Majesty’s Theatre till I, exhausted after hours of cross-examination concerning the Drama of the Continent—am merely a man’s shadow, and he proposes, in the indestructible buoyancy of youth, to play Nero on the summit

of Hampstead Heath while London is burning the midnight oil below. Even more than the vividness of her pen, I admire the infinite tenderness and indulgence with which she describes his character, illumines his great qualities and successes, glosses over his little weaknesses, his divine love of ego, his failures and see-sawings with Dame Fortune, his communion with the world at large to the yearning of his home-folk. Her love must have been immense and undying, and by that love has been begotten a memorial somewhat idealised, but in the main vitally true—the figure of a personality who was great as an artist in all the ramifications of the meaning, who was to the world off the stage the example of a grand seigneur and a consummate diplomatist, and to the inner circle a lovable friend with the heart of a child and, often, the wiles and caprices of a Peter Pan who would never grow up if he lived as long as Methusaleh, and would ever find joy in the naïvest thing as well as in a gentle murder by epigram.

There is one phase in Sir Herbert's life which Lady Tree has altogether omitted (and there is also the slip that the *Pompadour* was founded on a French play—as a matter of fact, it was adapted from A. E. Brachvogel's "Narciss," the "parade" part of all German actors). This phase was his visit to Berlin in 1907 at the invitation of Wilhelm II. In those days, when we all tried to establish an "all serene" with Germany, when we had a German Theatre in London, when German editors were welcomed with open arms in London, and London Pressmen fêted in Berlin as if all were well in the best of worlds, Tree achieved, perhaps, the greatest personal triumph of his life. The Emperor literally doted on him and Viola; he passed on horseback Unter den Linden and paused at the Hotel Bristol to salute them; he invited him to the Schloss; he spent hours with him discussing drama and Shakespeare—Tree came back one evening saying "he knows his Shakespeare better than I"; he missed only one performance at the New Royal Theatre, and then sent the Empress and Princess Louise to represent him; he paid court to Constance Collier, and singled Lyn Harding out for special praise—in fine, he made Tree feel that if there are Kings on thrones there are Kings in art who deserve equal homage. And Herbert Tree

became not only the admired of the Emperor, but the idol of the people ; and when during the performance of " Antony and Cleopatra " there was a strikelet among the stage hands—beer was the cause !—and a premature raising of the curtain revealed Herbert the Great shifting scenery along with his faithful stage-manager, Mr. King, and his gifted secretary, Frederic Whelen, there was an ovation which for ever established him as the darling of the Berlin gods. For he had proved himself a sportsman, and that appealed to the Germans of the good old times when in many ways Berlin was more English than London itself. Imitation ever remains the sincerest form of flattery. It was a fine trait in Tree's character that all this adulation never silenced his criticism of aspects of German life and art. Indeed, since the dramatic critics of the Berlin Press were not over-tender to him, he did not mince matters in his defence. He spoke German as well as a native ; one of his speeches at the Deutsches Theater which he was supposed to have written down, but which was a brilliant impromptu from a white piece of paper, created a sensation. He was educated at a German school, and knew all that there was to know about land and people. But he was from top to toe, in breeding and in culture, the complete English gentleman, who, when the time came, did his level best to win America for the cause of the Allies. Thus threefold is his claim to a place in our Pantheon—as an artist, as a man, as a patriot.

CHAPTER XXXI.—October 23rd, 1920.

Gay Erin. William Heinemann. The Renaissance of the Operetta.

WHENEVER I see an Irish comedy, I think of the books of Couperus, the renowned Dutch author, the books of the Little Souls, that microcosm of narrow horizon, small interests, petty quarrels, puny policy, impish intrigue, mean cupidity—a wicked, backbiting, selfish little world on the surface, yet under the crust not unlovable, and saved by the heavenly grace of innate, irresponsible, irresistible humour. There is a vast difference between the Dutch bourgeoisie and the Irish villagers—the difference between phlegm and hot blood—but deep down there is a fundamental similarity. Both races are practical, cunning, material, cute, and romantic. In the Dutch it is latent; in the Irish it belches forth in torrents of words, in upheavals, in squabbles growing well-nigh to fisticuffs, and then—as by magic—the blood proves thicker than water, and all is well for a time in the world of the little souls. Discussing this with a friend when we enjoyed that little comedy of great humour, “The White-Headed Boy,” by Lennox Robinson, she said: “And don’t you feel how much of Jewry there is in the Irish character—that everlasting money-grubbing, that exuberance of speech and gesticulation, that back-biting among and behind themselves, and yet that great unity when the outsider attacks the fold?” The proposition startled me, I admit; but there is much truth in it, and explains, perhaps, why the Irish, like the Jews, have remained a race apart, have suffered and survived, and all over the world, despite occasional dissensions, are—I would like to call it a freemasonry into which the stranger may be introduced, but never will be admitted into intimacy. All these good folk in the play speak our language—with an accent—but beyond that we felt that they were wholly different, intellectually, morally, ethically. To us these Irish interiors are plays in the widest sense of the word—they interest and amuse us, just as we are amused and interested when we go to Montmartre, to the Ghetto, or Chinatown. We don’t find them always pleasant people: the finest scene in the play, when old Duffy courts his ancient flame and promises not to bring a breach-of-promise action in the name of his daughter

Delia if she will give him a hundred and her hand—exquisite Irish humour this!—would be unacceptable on English soil, even in Lancashire. In the English *milieu* that scene would be hard, repellent; in the Irish it seems suave, quite natural, an attractive combination of materialism and romance. And so it is all through: we are constantly swung between like and dislike, between appreciation and disapproval—but in the end we take to them all, from the foolish darling mother and her white-headed boy, to the hard-headed brother (who bears the burden of the family), to the speculative auntie, and the stern but cunning old fellow who becomes master of the situation—and her. Acted in true racial spirit by all concerned, from Sara Allgood, Maire O'Neill (the auntie, her best part for years—a little masterpiece of characterisation), and Arthur Sinclair, to Mignon O'Doherty, Arthur Shields, and the rest, the play was indeed a microcosm of joy, with incidental home-truths directed to Great Britain which, duly noted in high quarters, might materially affect the solution of the Irish problem.

The world of the theatre owes a great deal to the late William Heinemann. He was a very long-headed man—and a very charming, cultured one to boot. When the general saying was, "English people won't read plays," he made up his mind to make them do it. He gave us editions of Ibsen, d'Annunzio, Maeterlinck; and when these proved a great success—Ibsen and Maeterlinck being sold out time after time—he ventured on what some called a very foolhardy thing. He announced and issued a complete set of the plays of Pinero. If memory is not at fault, he led off with "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," which had achieved European fame; and, in spite of the sceptic, the "Pinero Plays" became very popular, and have done much to make our premier playwright better known abroad. Among other things, the publication led to an unexpected departure. Years after the plays saw the footlights, some librettists discovered in the famous Pinero farces great possibilities as musical comedies and operettas. It would never have struck them if Mr. Heinemann had not added to the gaiety of the world by these dainty little books. And so we have enjoyed—under different titles—

“The Magistrate” and “In Chancery” with jingle, song, and dance at the Adelphi, and ere long the nimble pens of Fernand Nozière and René Kerdyk will show us what French *esprit* will make of “The Amazons.”

Heinemann, having done so much for the work of others, having lived among dramatists and for dramatists, having studied the drama of Germany, Scandinavia, Italy, France (whose languages he mastered as his own), eventually succumbed to the infection—he too would write plays; and he wrote three of them, which, alas! have never reached the world beyond the cover of books. Heinemann wrote these plays as interludes between hard work and hard thinking. Influential as he was, he never pushed them, nor did he seem to care whether they were produced or not. When I offered to give “Summer Moths” at the Independent Theatre—it was just before the war, I think—he, an old friend, greeted the proposal lukewarmly, when I expected eagerness. “*Passato*,” he said, “do it if you like, but it dates.” And he damped my ardour. Yet he did not entirely forsake his old love, for a few months ago, on a cosy evening in his artistic shrine of a house, we discussed many things, amongst others his plays. When we went over a scene, and I told him that he would yet “write another,” he said “Perhaps,” and hinted darkly at a scenario somewhere in a drawer. Months passed. Three weeks ago, at the exact hour of six, when I was reading in my usual chair in Kensington Gardens, I saw him passing, and, with a congratulation on his recent adornment with the *Palmes de la Couronne de Belgique*, I asked “And the play?” “*Qui vivra verra*,” said he. Poor old friend—I read of his death at the same hour on the same spot, and the suddenness of it blighted a beautiful autumn day.

The operetta has come back, and to stay. I predicted it two years ago, when the music of “Madame Angot” enraptured us at Drury Lane, and would have paved the way for a glorious and continuous renaissance if the interpretation had been as fascinating as the orchestra. However, better a little late than never: here is the operetta, which will prove a formidable rival to musical comedy, and perhaps oust it altogether

when our librettists have learned not only to inscribe their texts "opéra-bouffe," but to gauge the devilry, the joy, the abandon, the *vogue la galère* and the amiable *je-m'en-fichisme* of the weird adjective *bouffe*—the bow-wow of frolicking spirits of word and music at the grave world. In "The Naughty Princess," who will reign for a year and more at the Adelphi, the composer (who is French) has caught the spirit of the thing; but the librettist—or rather, the adapter of some French book—who is a witty Englishman, Mr. J. Hastings Turner, has tackled a latently ticklish subject all too squeamishly. He does not go for his possibilities with a brave heart: a Princess running away from a starchy Court to *décolleté* Montmartre, a duenna always amorous, a young swain (would-be painter—as green as a budding leaf), the Quat'z Arts, an artist's studio, midnight and dawn—upon my word, I am not a librettist, but I wager I could make something of that material. Mr. Turner is too bashful, perhaps. Afraid of Mrs. Grundy, he relies too much on his comedians; what he contributes himself is harmless operetta—text nice to read, no doubt, but conventional and mechanical. The music is otherwise. The orchestration is full of glad eye and *bande joyeuse*; you hear Offenbach in the distance, and Cuvillier in the melody. With Lily St. John (delightful divette), George Grossmith, and W. H. Berry, it seems like good old times up to date.

CHAPTER XXXII.—October 30th, 1920.

Iris Hoey. Vaudeville Genre. Gallery First Nights.

MISS IRIS HOEY is London's latest, youngest, and most unrevealed actress-manageress. After a time the experienced playgoer fairly knows the ebb and flow of histrionic talent. Of some we know exactly how far they will go and in what manner they will go there. They are endeared to us like certain nostrums in the domestic medicine-chest. We know how they will apply themselves to the part affected. Those who, like America, are a land of unlimited possibilities, belong to the elect, and Miss Iris Hoey is one of them. Hers is the career of the self-made artist ever in quest of excellent guidance, every ready and studious, keenly observant, unsparing of self, and—in more instances than one—battling despairingly to win a forlorn cause. In her progressive record I can recall but one creation entirely missed—and that passed almost unnoticed, and was more due to insufficient rehearsal than temperamental unsuitability; I also remember parts which she saved by mere *tour de force*; but, withal, her every appearance is full of interest, and proves that experience engenders growing versatility and intensity of emotional power. In the little play with which she made her first managerial bow (and a delightful speechlet to return thanks), in "Priscilla and the Profligate," by Miss Laura Wildig—which is, in its main theme, a chastened edition of "The Marriage of Kitty," a pleasant love story in a good world where lots of things are taken for granted and no one approaches the wickedness of reality—Miss Iris Hoey plays a girl of sixteen and a young woman of twenty-two. I differentiate, to indicate appearance and mentality. Now, Miss Hoey is not sixteen, and in ordinary aspect she is in every way a most attractive specimen of *tout ce qu'il y a de plus femme*—the French expression conveys it all. Yet so adaptable is her talent that when in the first act, with her hair plaited and brushed back over her forehead, we are asked to believe that she is still a mere chit, she imitates the ways of sweet and innocent sixteen so completely that on our part there is no need to make an effort—we accept the make-believe, for the intelligence of the artist overcomes the possibilities of doubt. Anon we see quite a different

woman, so changed, so world-wise, so elegant, so diplomatic, that we again accept the proposition of the playwright, who submits that the husband never suspected the identity of his one-day bride after six years' separation. It is in this part of the game—which, of course, leads to the happy ending—that we discover new sides to the talent of Miss Iris Hoey. She turns the light little part into a profound study of femininity, without ever weighting it; like a little bird she flits and flutters from phase to phase, from mood to mood, from smiles to tears from real joy to affected anguish. “*Mais elle joue comme une Parisienne,*” said a French visitor. “That”—said I—“that is exactly what I want to say about her.” Hers is the spirit of French acting grafted on an English text—no small achievement, forsooth!

There were two other interesting manifestations in “Priscilla.” A triumph of the old school and of the new—the delicious humour of a *nouveau riche* which rendered the few lines Mr. H. de Lange has to say a complete caricature; and the equally delectable manner of Mr. Frank Denton as an absent-minded beggar, who in rare nimbleness and aptness of poses blurted, propelled, catapulted commonplaces in such unconsciousness of his surroundings that we roared at his face, his gestures, and his voice whenever he darted for no particular purpose into the action. His is the priceless gift which is best compared to our late Herbert Tree when he spoke to those on earth as one who had just dropped from the clouds.

On the occasion of the second edition of “Just Fancy” at the Vaudeville, we were regaled by the Brothers Gatti and Mr. Charlott with a fascinating Souvenir, a Revue of the history of the Vaudeville. Its author is Mr. McDonald Rendle, who is the sprightliest of all the theatrical “memorialists” of our time, and whose knowledge is as thorough as it is entertainingly imparted. The little book, adorned with many photographs of the stars that radiated at the Vaudeville under the Thornes and the elder Brothers Gatti, contains a vivid record of the fortunes of the theatre and recalls happy evenings with H. J. Byron, Fielding, Buchanan, Basil Hood, and Henry Arthur Jones,

and, later, with Seymour Hicks, whose productions were the forerunners of the now popular revue.

"Just Fancy," which has been brought up to date, newly dressed and enriched with one or two episodes, remains a revue in the truest sense of the word. It heckles the things that are; it makes merry over persons and phases; it gambols in song and dance; it has two excellent leaders in Mr. Walter Williams and Mr. Ralph Lynn,—the immortal *Algy of Knutsland*—and charming soubrettes in Miss Betty Chester, Miss Ivy Tresmand and Miss Binnie Hale. It is clever, clean, never vulgar, and it displays in alluring discretion of attire as much female beauty as is piquant and bewitching, without despoiling our illusions. Two of the episodes are gems of humour. The one is "*Ringcraft*," in which a shrewd husband knocks down a prize-fighter for a "fiver" to cure his wife of infatuation. The other, a mordant satire on the morals of to-day, relates, in "*The Solution*," how a modern woman hails the simulated death of husband and lover to fall into the arms of Number Three. This little play in a few minutes creates more dramatic interest than many a play which fills a whole evening. The characters are drawn with lightning touches, the dialogue, in terse sentences, creates a poignant conflict: we are keenly expectant of the "*Solution*," and not a little excited by the quarrel of the two friends over the absent woman, and then there is the great laugh which turns the tragic into broad farce and convinces us once more that of all the riddles of the universe woman is the greatest. With some elaboration this little thriller and triller will become a favourite among amateurs. It will be equally successful in the Theatre Royal Bath-Drawing-Room (as we used to call the dilettante theatre in olden days) as at the Vaudeville, where it remains—with syncopated chorus of audience and actors in "I know where the flies go"—the joy of a joyful entertainment.

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The Gallery First-Nighters announce their reconstitution and return to activity. These theatrical enthusiasts were a very ardent and important body in pre-war days, and saw to it that not every dramatic goose was hailed as a swan. Theirs was a labour of love and justice.

They feared neither long vigils at the gallery door nor stress of wind or weather. They upheld honoured traditions, and were ever ready to acclaim new talent among authors and actors wherever they found it ; they pronounced judgment without fear or favour, and in their latter days taught their fellow visitors aloft the gentle art of discretion. In approval they were hearty to the pitch of enthusiasm ; in dissatisfaction they rarely indulged in or tolerated the unpleasant " boo "—they would neither bait the author nor let the actor suffer for the former's shortcomings. They gradually adopted, and in their surroundings often enforced, the hush of silence, which is far more effective and dignified than boisterous execration. For a gallery which does not applaud affects the whole house ; it kills the echo from above which is the final note of success. Thus the gallery proves to be both the sanitary inspector of the premises as well as the true friend of the manager. All too often nowadays the first night bamboozles the manager, the author, and the player into the belief that victory has been won, for the friends in stalls and dress-circle applaud and shout in the spirit of the mere formality of a " vote of thanks " for nothing. It is the same empty courtesy as the " many thanks for a charming evening " when, in Society, you have been bored to tears. In social life there is no harm in this camouflage of urbanity ; in the theatre it is baneful, because it encourages bad art and dopes the people on the stage into the spurious felicity of a fool's paradise. How cruel it is to go home—as manager or actor—and think it is a success, it will run—and to find in a few days, when the play's real impression has filtered through to the multitude, that people won't come, and that the dreaded notice must soon go up !

CHAPTER XXXIII.—November 6th, 1920.

Compton Mackenzie's First. Charles Palmer, M.P. William Lestocq.

IF Mr. Compton Mackenzie has been present at the performances of his "Columbine" at the Kennington Theatre, he will have gathered valuable information for his future guidance as a playwright. A Saturday night at Kennington is a sight for the gods and—the manager. There is no first-night flummery there. People go to be amused and to get their money's-worth. The house, packed and expectant, is in a receptive mood, and it expresses its appreciation and enthusiasm in volumes of applause. They always applaud on principle, the patrons of Kennington's majestic playhouse—a building that casts many a West End theatre into the shade—for if they are not too well pleased with the play, they feel they must demonstrate their love for the actors, about whom they know much more than the average playgoer on the other side of the water. But there is a strange graduation in their clapping; if they are held there runs through the salvos an inexpressible magnetic force which betokens real enthusiasm: it is like the vibration of a battery, it is lasting and communicative. If I were not a critic, who must not show outward signs of his feelings, I should be carried away by the multitude and join in. But when the act does not come up to expectation there is the acclamation of courtesy: a lukewarm noise, like the obligato of a feeble orchestration. And here comes in the object-lesson for Mr. Compton Mackenzie. That he has the gift of the playwright is beyond dispute; that he is not merely one who forces his novelist's experience into a dramatic mould is equally patent. He has the instinct of the theatre, and he manœuvres many characters with the ease of spontaneity. All the scenes in the Raeburn family, in the studio, in the dressing room of the chorus (the latter an excellent, realistic study of yesterday's life in the wings, crass but vivid), are interesting and dramatic. His characters are, then, not mere puppets, but fairly lifelike—they talk too much for stage proportions, yet that is a detail easily shorn. Still, when it comes to the duologues—I would rather like to call them duets—the reality and individuality of his figures dwindle. They indulge in tirades which are unfamiliar to the stage;

they savour of the book, the essay, the psychological analysis which even in Mr. Mackenzie's novels often hampers progress. But in the novel you can skip, and in the theatre you must listen, and when people go on talking, talking, *ad infinitum*—"more explanations," the man in the street calls it—interest flags. It is a question of *métier* and theatrical economics—an impressive science, but one that makes or mars plays.

Kennington felt that, and so it was far more fascinated by the incidental episodes quoted above than by the real drama, the love-story of Columbine of Islington and her gentleman-lover. And when it came to the final scene, the return of the lover, the confession by Columbine of her lapse, her refusal to marry him, yet steering by fatuous persuasion to the inevitable happy ending, the audience realised that there was something wrong, something wanting in logic; that they were coaxed to accept a solution in which they could not believe. There was no need to compare the play with the book and its inevitable catastrophe. The play itself indicated which way out the author should have chosen; there are situations, even on the stage, which no profusion of words can dissolve by *tour de force*. The central idea of Columbine demanded an unhappy ending: the alteration of this course was both an artistic error and a theatrical concession that failed. "Columbine" was played at Kennington, and will anon continue its career at the Prince's, by the Nottingham Repertory Company, Mrs. Compton's posthumous tribute to the memory of her husband. It is an excellent band of players, with such distinguished artists as Mr. Frank Bertram, Miss Eileen Munro, Miss Joan Hay, Miss Hilda Bruce-Potter, and our latest *jeune premier*, Mr. Bobbie Andrews, in the vanguard. Miss Ellen Compton was the Columbine, and although her work reveals experience and intelligence, and she had moments of real pathos which saved the last act, she is not exactly the woman of the part. She lost the air of romance which was the charm of the heroine in the book, and the secret of its success. Miss Compton was too matter-of-fact, too often the actress acting; and that bereft the character of its atmosphere which pervaded the novel—a rhapsody and an elegy of youth, the seventh heaven, and disenchantment.

Others will appraise the Parliamentary work of Mr. Charles Palmer, whose brilliant career was curtailed with tragic suddenness. He was, in the truest sense of the word, a victim of his duty, for he was an unsparing worker, and his versatility was as amazing as the lightning facility of his pen. We were friends and members of the same club, and on many a Saturday evening we sat opposite one another recording our impressions of a *première* for the Sunday Press. To him this was child's play. The sheets literally flew from his pad, and, despite his rapidity, he was always thorough, often brilliant, and he could relate the synopsis of a plot with a graphic touch of rare vividness. As he did not sign his articles in the *Globe*, the world hardly knew him as a critic so well as he deserved; nor did he often refer to his dramatic work, which he loved, yet considered the lesser part of his activity. If one got him to talk of himself, it would be of his Parliamentary sketches, of his leading articles—of all that he did in politics. That was his life-task, and, long before he obtained the mandate for Westminster, he indicated that it was the height of his ambition to descend from the Gallery to the Well. In matters dramatic as well as in politics he had the courage of his opinions; he knew neither fear nor favour, and praised and chastised with fervour born of enthusiasm, experience, and knowledge—a knowledge so vast that he was equally well equipped in music and literature as in the drama and the affairs of State. He was a journalist *par excellence*, and often he used “to take my breath away” when, on my bidding him good-night at a witching hour with an “Aren't you going too, Charlie?” he would exclaim, “Going? Good Lord, no! I have to review the latest Galsworthy, to write a leader for the *National News*, and one or two odd little things for *John Bull*.” At fifty he leaves a harvest of at least three men of his age. Such workers are rare, and the loss of Charles Palmer will be felt in many venues, to say nothing of his endless circle of friends.

Another figure has disappeared from the theatrical world in William Lestocq, actor, author, manager. As an actor he excelled in such parts as the French call the “grands valets”: Lestocq's butlers were little

monuments at their time. As an author he had his hour of glory—and, if we remember well, of squabbles with Mrs. Grundy—when, with dear old Harry Nicholls, the popular comedian (happily still with us), he wrote a naughty, funny, long-lived little farce, “Jane,” which was the joy of all London for a long while. As a manager, he rendered yeoman service to the late Charles Frohman. His loyalty to Frohman was proverbial; his dealings with the actors were characterised by great indulgence and tender solicitude for the smaller fry. In the days when dresses, but not shoes and stockings, were provided for the actresses, and those of the lesser pay used to come to him with their tales of woe, he consoled them: “Never mind, my dear; you get your shoes and stockings, put them down to me—I will make it all right with the ‘Governor’ (Frohman); but for heaven’s sake don’t talk about it—I can’t ‘let ’em all come.’” That was the man in a nutshell. A still water with a deep undercurrent of human kindness.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—December 18th, 1920.

Our Home of Mystery. "Fedora." "Dear George." "S.O.S."

A MEMBER of the Magic Circle, perhaps the most fascinating club in London, I never miss an opportunity to spend a happy afternoon in the Theatre of St. George's Hall, where our president, Mr. Nevil Maskelyne, waves his wand. London's Home of Mystery, as it used to be called, despite its several scores of age, still gaily flourishes in unabated freshness of inventiveness and novelty. Here you see the finest conjurers in the world; here Indians display, but never reveal, their witching secrets of incredible magic—bodies floating in the air, yet seemingly unsuspected, the mango-tree growing from a handful of sand, the birth of beauty in an empty cupboard—wondersome things that fill children with glee and set the grown-ups searching "how it is done." Here three generations of Maskelynes have brought the living world in touch with the unseen, and Clive—Maskelyne III.—he who fought so well in the war, in his *début*, proves that he is a worthy henchman of his father. He conjures up spirits from nowhere; he brings us in contact with them, lets them rap and speak and jingle bells; and with a dry humour which is the peculiar gift of all true Maskelynes, he explains his wonders so deftly that we are more befogged than ever; for, like the French orator, he uses the word to hide the thought. And we go hence as enchanted as Carroll's Alice, and happy that, for a brief span, we have been allowed to forget the workaday world and to dwell among the stuff that dreams are made of.

With great pluck, in the face of haunting memories, Miss Marie Löhr has dared to impersonate the most famous of all Sardou's heroines, "Fedora," and she has succeeded beyond all expectation. Incidentally, she has revived our admiration for the great Master of Unity, whose stage-craft remains dominating in spite of newer methods and simpler structure. Unless one is entirely blunted to what the French call "*du théâtre*," there is no gainsaying that the third act of "Fedora," when Ipanoff becomes the lover of the woman who had vowed to entrap and surrender him to the Russian police, is intensely thrilling. It may not

bear investigation, nor, at this late hour, would it mean more than fruitless labour to attempt it, but the effect is overwhelming. You may know the play backwards, but when you see that great scene of love and anguish acted with sincerity, you cannot help being carried away. And it was in this episode that both Miss Marie Löhr and her partner, Mr. Guy Rathbone, the Ipanoff, rose to the situation. Temperamentally Miss Löhr is perhaps not all that *Fedora* means—what English actress has such fervour of the seething cauldron as Sarah!—but her emotional power has developed and deepened, and (except when she says “I” in rare accents of strident egoism) she convinces us that she feels the passion, the terror, the intensity of the situation. Her death-scene, most difficult both technically and histrionically, is an achievement that vies with the performance of the foremost. She literally lives it—Irish though it may sound—in her writhing, in her breathing, her convulsions, her final fall—there is all the struggle which means a painful transit from robust youth to eternity. Mr. Rathbone, too, is an actor who forgets himself in the creation of his part. He has still to acquire the distinction which the character of so perfect a man of the world demands, but he sounds true, and moves us by the intensity of his feelings.

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If the stranger within our gates should ask me, as often is the case, which play in London is most typical of English life, I would tell him to go and see “*Milestones*,” and you will at a glimpse understand the nation, its mind, its conventions, and—the secret of its supremacy in the concert of the world. “*Milestones*”—although history has made a great stride since its inception, and the order of things has changed—remains a vital human document. It is a human document worthy to rank with Galsworthy’s master pictures of “*The Man of Property*” and “*In Chancery*.” It is realistic in the artistic sense of the word. It is introspective, for there is a “*John*” in all of us. It is human, because its characters are a bunch of living beings to whom we could point with our fingers in our daily walk of life. Abroad, “*Milestones*”—and Galsworthy—have done more to lead to an understanding of our people than volumes of analysis. At the *Royalty* it is acted to perfection,

though we may regret the absence of some whose creations are indelibly fixed in our memory. But Mr. Dennis Eadie's John, Mr. Harben's brother, and Miss Haidée Wright's spinster remain such monumental portrayals that we must hold them up to the playgoers of foreign lands as "Milestones" of English acting.

It is more than ten years ago since the late George Giddens went to America, never to return; but, unlike the majority of actors, who drop "out of the bill, out of sight, into oblivion," his memory remains as fresh as paint. Mention "dear old George" to the seasoned playgoer, and he would grin and say, "Oh, yes; Tony Lumpkin, and Bludgen in 'Are You a Mason?' What's the old chap doing now?" Now George was not a great comedian, but he was a singularly sunny personality; he loved his job; he had kindheartedness written all over his easy body; and he had a smile that was as irresistible as it was unforgettable. In Tony Lumpkin, his masterpiece of quiet humour, it was the innocent smile of the country yokel with a touch of roguery beneath its guilelessness. In Bludgen, the flighty husband of "Are You a Mason?" it was the smile of the bashful prevaricator, so apologetic, so childlike, so like the little dog's "I know that I am naughty, master, but you won't hit me, will you?" that we all hoped and prayed for a merciful release from his "fix" and his austere spouse's searching cross-examination. He had only to be himself to capture his audience. His range was limited, and when he had a part unsuited to him he could do little with it; but in his particular line he was unsurpassed—a kind of classic; a stripping of the old school which worshipped diction, elaboration of detail, and knew how to measure effect with the accuracy of a surveyor. Besides, he was a prince of good fellows, and between him and the public there was a kind of unwritten camaraderie which created sympathetic understanding the very moment he and his smile moved from the wings to the footlights.

At the sign of "S.O.S." in the papers, the Everyman Theatre in Hampstead is asking for funds to continue its activities. To some

this was a surprise ; to those who know the risks of theatrical enterprise it came not unexpected. But what filled every man with amazement was to learn that so much money had been expended to achieve so little. It is the old story so often repeated in the English theatre : " Bricks and mortar first ; art next." One would not like to be hard at this *impasse* ; but was it wise, judicious, sound to convert a drill-hall at great expense into an imperfect theatre for the production of a *répertoire* of " repetition " ? Did the directors really believe that Hampstead would patronise in the long run second bloomings of old plays which everybody had seen to perfection in the West End ? For, except a little play by Mr. Galsworthy, not one of the productions of the Everyman Theatre brought novelty ; even its opening piece, " The Bias of the World," from the Spanish, had been tried none too successfully by the Stage Society ; and the " Romeo and Juliet " experiment was damned with faint praise even by those who from the first were staunch supporters of the new enterprise. A Hampstead man who is a great friend of local activity, who loves his neighbourhood and its people, put it tersely : " At first we said, ' Well and good ' ; we did not like the Spanish play and we were afraid of ' Nan,' but we went. But when the *répertoire* promised nothing new, save an act by Galsworthy, we said, ' Two shows at the Everyman means one stall in the West (and something new), and so we plumped for the West." It is significant and it is common-sense. There is room and hope for a theatre in the suburb, particularly such an opulent suburb as Hampstead ; but there must be a *raison d'être*.

CHAPTER XXXV.—December 25th, 1920.

Maggie Teyte. "The Knight of the Burning Pestle." French at the R.A.D.A.

IN Miss Maggie Teyte a true artist has acceded to musical comedy. She may, as yet, not be an accomplished actress ; she may betray, at times, that her emotional power is greater than her technical equipment : but there is no gainsaying that she raises the whole standard of the entertainment. In its way, "The Little Dutch Girl" at the Lyric is the prettiest thing in town : the Dutch scene is exquisitely picturesque, amiably idealistic of race and people, unspeakably cosy with its windmill and drawbridge ; the palace is all glitter and glory : and the story is—well, as attractive as all stories are when princesses run away from etiquette to follow the dictates of their hearts. For the comic element there is scope galore : Mr. Lauri de Frece is delightful as a diminutive Court-Marshall of quaint pomposity ; Miss Cicely Debenham is a "vital spark" in a free body ; Mr. Hulbert is the last word of the dandified "silly-ass," whose mad manner is full of intellectual method—he dances as with winged feet, he warbles his comic songs with an intense sense of humour, he has the 'varsity grace and assurance, and, withal, he is the complete man of the world in frolicsome mood. When all this is said there remains the beautiful music of Mr. Emmerich Kalman, and Miss Maggie Teyte. The score is full of melody, full of the lilt of Viennese sentiment and joy : a charming *Leit-motif* runs like a will-of-the-wisp through every act, there is a valse of lingering loveliness, and there are two finales which stamp Kalman a musician commanding every instrument and a master of orchestration.

I think that this music of "The Little Dutch Girl" has not been appreciated as it would have been if the composer had been one of us or our Allies. It is a fact that even now there remains a barrier between art and origin. Still, those who understand music, and are unswayed by chauvinistic feelings, will acknowledge that as a score there is nothing on the London stage to equal or to approach it. Kalman—at any rate in this work—shows inspiration, and although he understands the *métier* to the full, there is in his music nothing which savours of the catchpenny

or the facile. His melodies flow from his lyre, they are not made to order. No wonder, then, that Miss Maggie Teyte was literally carried away by her themes, and that she sang with all her heart and soul, with a fervour so intense that the audience had to collect itself before bursting into enthusiasm. Mr. Iredale, the young lover, too, came in for his share of acclamation. I hear that on the first night he was marred by nervousness; by the time I saw him he was his spirited young self. It was sheer joy to listen to them, and one can only hope that Mr. Seymour Hicks's effort to re-naturalise the operetta will meet with the success it deserves. It is a delightful genre when author, composer, artists and producer harmonise in symphonic and dramatic collaboration.

Mr. Nigel Playfair is rapidly making a name as the explorer of our classic treasure-trove. His is the admirable method of grafting modern ideas and methods on ancient texts. He succeeded in "The Beggar's Opera"; he achieved even more in "The Knight of the Burning Pestle," for here he was unaided by music and had to apply his own inventiveness. The play, which is germane to the Bottom scenes of the "Midsummer Night's Dream," is but a thin and flippant affair. It is amusing in conception, but very long, and its main interest is its reliquarian value as a specimen of old-world jollity, and especially its character as a forerunner of the revue of to-day. With a little imagination on the hearer's part, here is an exact counterpart of the entertainment which, *via* Paris, has become an institution in London. The author goes as he pleases, the actors do as they please: they burst into song in season and out of it; they may gag in words and in gesture; they may handle the text or mishandle it; all's fair in this mad game of satire and mock-earnestness, provided that the actors enter into the spirit of it and gambol in the vein of the Merrie England of olden times, when the Maypole was in flower, when actors were gay rogues and vagabonds, when the "high-brow" was non-existent or openly derided, when the grocer was an important personage, his buxom wife the true representative of woman's rights, when the audience sat on the stage, and when the tankard, unrestricted, was merrily swung from hand to hand, and the "*in vino*

veritas " turned the leisure hours of this vale of tears into an Eden minus the serpent. Mr. Nigel Playfair, with one eye on the past and not a less keen one on the present, has spurred his exponents into the gallop of the thing. They all act with *joie de vivre*, and although Miss Betty Chester, whatever she may say in refutation of the critics, is not quite the dreadnought the grocer's wife should be, she *acts* the part with much understanding, with dash, and with such spirit as flings every line, like an arrow, into the audience. In Mr. Noel Coward, Mr. Playfair has found the ideal hero of the story. He looks a beautifully grotesque, knightly figure; he plays with his tongue in his cheek; he, and also Mr. Eric Morgan, never miss a point. Not all are quite as lightsome in letting themselves go into the tomfoolery of which little Mr. Robson is perhaps *facile princeps*—a wonderful Sancho Panza on the horizon when one day a Don Quixote will be found to revive Mr. G. A. Morrison's capital tragi-comedy of that name. As I said, not all the actors played *à la diable*, but that may come when they are accustomed to the strange amalgamation between public and players. For that is the charm of this peculiar production: so close is the relationship between audience and stage that great is the temptation just to jump into the fray and to take a hand at this weird comedy of errors.

Our new Royal Academy of Dramatic Art is proudly living up to its 'scutcheon. The influx of students is constant and progressive; there reigns at Gower Street the activity of a beehive. The French section, under the inspiring guidance of Mlle. Gachet, is both venturesome and promising; the other day the pupils gave a performance of Molière's "Précieuses" and Dumas *père's* "Mariage sous Louis XV.," in which some of the students proved that, with effort and study, it is possible to attune the British tongue to the grace of French pronunciation. Mlle. Gachet's task is great and difficult, but the result warrants her labour of much love and little loss. Some students, of course, will never master the right pronunciation, but all have an opportunity to become acquainted with the meaning of the French classics, and the nimbleness of dialogue and action teaches them flexibility of movement.

and courtliness of manner. The beautiful theatre attached to the Academy is now well ready for occupation and experiment. It will be the Bijou Theatre of London, and in equipment its most modern and complete. Mr. Kenneth Barnes, ever zealous to develop the scope of his Academy, has hit upon a clever, and practical, idea to make the best use of the theatre. He has formed a club of ex-students with the triple purpose to bring the old mates together in friendship and conviviality (dances included!); to keep a list of the names and qualifications of ex-students to which managers may refer; to produce at the Academy Theatre plays written by members of the club considered worthy of being acted by them, and to invite managers and others (*i.e.*, the Press) who might help the students in their professional careers.

This latter idea appeals very much to all who live "in love and hope" for our theatre. Reviewing many names of those who joined the Academy since the day of Beerbohm Tree, several occur who have already made a name as playwrights, with Miles Malleson, the actor-author, first and foremost; others, one knows, are burning to swell the ranks of dramatists. Who knows that, with youth, enthusiasm, and talent in their quiver, the members of the R.A.D.A. Ex-Students' Club may not discover little Shakespeares, Shaws, and Pineros in their midst? There is nothing like practical experience, and here is a field where, without consideration of box-office and risk, new ideas may caper ahead in freedom and unfettered by all the unavoidable trammels which surround the regular stage. If only the members will remember that it is the cause that matters, not the individual, the Academy Theatre may become a power-station in our dramatic world. And with "Concordia res parvæ crescunt" on its pennant, the club of the young generation will flourish with unanimous God-speed at its launch.

CHAPTER XXXVI.—January 1st, 1921.

"It is All Wrong." "Jumble Sale." "Westward Ho!"
An English Gem at the Guignol.

THE week before Christmas brought us two revues—"It's All Wrong," mainly by Miss Elsie Janis, at the Queen's; and "Jumble Sale," mainly by Mr. J. H. Turner, but studded with witty lyrics by Mr. Reginald Azkell. "Jumble Sale" is the better of the twain. It is a revue of spontaneity—of the practised hand combined with satirical imagination. Miss Janis's effort is—well, it is what the word indicates, an effort, the 'prentice hand at work with labour and laudable intentions. Where revue is concerned, with its kaleidoscope of scenes—there were twenty-three in "Jumble Sale," twelve in "It's All Wrong"—memory is as unfailing a registrar as a thermometer. Memory exactly marks the rise and fall of your enjoyment. Of "It's All Wrong" I remember very little: a charming ballet *à la Russe* in Fragonard style, more imitation than parody; a few funny war scenes in an *estaminet* and at a bar, with the ubiquitous Stanley Lupino in excellent form; an attempt to make fun of the nursery of 1950—once again Stanley Lupino, a very funny overgrown baby in surroundings of feeble humour; a lilt of a song by Mr. Herman Finck; and some capital skits on Delysia and Nelson Keys by Miss Elsie Janis, who dances with the grace of a miniature Pavlova and sings several songs. I believe that there was somewhere an attempt at symbolism—conflict between discontent and happiness—but it was so blurred and so diffuse that we lost the trend *en route*. In sum, "It's All Wrong" leaves the impression of the mountain and the mole-hill.

In "Jumble Sale" it is the other way about. It creates great effects with a wonderfully marshalled little company, every member of which has rare versatility. It is an intellectual treat in its endless variety of skits and parodies, some of which, like all good wine, will mature when seasoned. One feels all the time that the librettists and the musician, Mr. Philip Braham, work in perfect harmony of understanding and joy; and the last tableau of all, "A Triumph of Memory"—when all the dear old songs of the good old times, from "Champagne

Charley" to "Daddy Wouldn't Buy Me a Bow-wow," the Sisters Bilton and Albert Chevalier, filed past and made us hum and wobble in our seats—is one of those happy thoughts which in itself means a long life and prosperity. The heroine of the evening was Miss Binnie Hale, the clever daughter of a clever father. She sang herself into fame in less than five minutes in a parody of Miss Phyllis Monkman—something so brilliant, so finely observed and worked out, so mordant, and so deceptive in its amusing realism that we hailed the little actress as a real artist. And that was not all. Her imitation of Miss Day in "Irene" was equally amazing; and, finally, her following in the footsteps of father Robert Hale was so like the proverbial two pins that the audience bestowed on her the greatest of all first-night honours—the demand for a speech. Then Binnie showed that she was unconscious of her glory, for "Thank you" was all we got from her, but it sounded right from the heart. I should like to write a few pæans of praise for the work of Mr. Walter Williams, the safe pilot of the Vaudeville cruises; of Miss Phyllis Titmuss, who is gaining in experience and displays a nice sense of character in her various parts; of Miss Joyce Barbour, who sings and dances with charm; of Mr. Eric Blore and Mr. Gilbert Childs, who with Mr. Williams share the gifts of the chameleon; of the clever playlets and skitlets which confirm that Mr. Hastings Turner is a humourist as well as a dramatist—but, since second-hand records of a revue can never convey the fascination of the thing, let me enjoin my readers to go and see for themselves. There is in this "Jumble Sale" a bargain for everyone, and M. Charlot will, no doubt, in due course inscribe over the portals of the Vaudeville the motto of the Soho restaurateur: "*Venez et vous reviendrez.*" I will!

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"Westward Ho!" said the astute Mr. Percy Hutchinson, one of the most enterprising managers of the younger generation, when he penetrated Canada, and scored a huge success with his unflinching fetish, "The Luck of the Navy." He found, to his (and our) amazement, that not for five years had an English company of repute visited the great western cities of the Dominion. He found wherever he went

"open sesame," great enthusiasm, and eagerness to learn more of the drama of the Mother-country, which a good Canadian affectionately calls "home." He was invited to make speeches at the leading clubs, the Kirwanis and the Rotary; from all sides came the clamour, "Send us English plays and musical comedies; we are tired of American control and we will help you." He became acquainted with captains of industry and railway magnates, and found them ready to help with all their might—money no object. As a first token of Canadian earnest, there arose a new theatre in Edmonton, a palace of which London would be proud; it was ready in five months; at Christmas it will be inaugurated with "General Post," which failed when played by an American company and came back triumphant manned by English players, accumulating receipts which dwarf all runs of London box-offices. Then, under the ægis of the millionaires, followed the great combine which acquired one hundred and thirty-six theatres all over Canada, and arranged with Percy Hutchinson that he should be the leader of the expeditionary forces from London and the chief comptroller on this side. Already the Esmonds, H. V. and his accomplished wife, Eva Moore, are gathering rich harvest with Esmond's finest comedy, "The Law Divine"; already "The Maid of the Mountains" with a bevy of British belles is conquering every city; as I write, Mr. Martin Harvey, persuaded by Mr. Hutchinson that Canada is waiting to greet, to honour, and to feast him, is on the high seas; and anon, it is on the cards that two great melodrama companies, and perhaps the complete Gaiety Company, will yield to the temptations of the Magnetic North. Thus, Mr. Percy Hutchinson's Canadian enterprise is not only a great business undertaking, but one of patriotic propaganda.

Our Grand Guignol is becoming an institution, and all credit to Mr. José S. Levy for his efforts to give English plays a predominant place in his programme. He has in "Eight o'Clock," by Reginald Berkeley, found a real human document, a most realistic and truthful picture of the dread hour of a criminal's execution. Sir W. S. Gilbert wrote for the late James Welch a similar tragedy of great power, but

this little work by the happy author of "French Leave" has the character of the slice of life. In its evenness of construction it is deeply moving: we are as concerned in the sorry struggle of the clergyman who endeavours to preach all-mercifulness to the doomed man as in the anguish of the latter, who, too young to die, waits vainly for reprieve and goes to the scaffold in repentant protest. The acting of Mr. Russell Thorndike and Mr. Lewis Casson, as the condemned man and the clergyman, are worthy of the play. It was wholly untheatrical; it was felt. The audience was deeply impressed. Of the remaining quartet of plays, André de Lorde's "Private Room No. 6" was the best—Sardou in a nutshell and Russia of 1914 on the horizon. A grandee of Tsardom feasts in Paris while dictating pogroms from a safe distance; he has met a woman whom he desires and has invited her to a private room. She is the true type of the flaxen-haired Sonia of Nihilism. Her brother has been killed by order of the tyrant: she, in the gay feathers of a bird of paradise, will wreak vengeance. She watches the wine rising to high tide, she tolerates his brutal caresses, she coaxes and cajoles, then she winds her long white glove around his throat and "garrots" him. Justice is done! Miss Sybil Thorndike was magnificent in this part. She created mystery on her appearance; she wore a vacant look; we scented the catastrophe to come. Her repulsion, her decision, her nerving herself to the fell deed, was intensely dramatic. A shudder ran through the house. Mr. Bealby's General was the type to the life: a *bon vivant* with a certain polish of manner; underneath, the human beast. "*Grattez le Russe, vous trouverez le Tartare.*" It was frightfully thrilling, and we enjoyed it because it was—of the Theatre.

CHAPTER XXXVII.—January 8th, 1921.

A Woman's Verdicts. A. A. Milne. "Cinderella."

AT the portals of a New Year, when our *Illustrated London News* goes through many hands in many lands, it may be in the fitness of things to say a few words about our London stage. And I can find no cheerier message than the remarks of a charming Londoner who, after seven years of happiness in the Argentine, came home to England's beauty and its Christmas, and made a gay round of the theatres of the Metropolis. "I may be wrong," said she, "but in my recollection I have never found in London such a series of fine plays, so much originality, and so much literary quality." And then she reeled off her coil: began with Shakespeare over the water and at the Court, touched on Galsworthy's "Skin Game," on "Milestones," on "Mary Rose," on "The White-Headed Boy," on "The Wandering Jew," on "The Prude's Fall," on "The Great Lover," on "French Leave," on the "Grand Guignol," on "Fedora," on "The Knight of the Burning Pestle," and "The Beggar's Opera"—can you beat it? Can Paris beat it?—can Berlin, Vienna, or Rome? She spoke of the beauty of "The Blue Lagoon," of "Chu Chin Chow"—the picture, not the piece: she extolled the "nut-shell universality" of a revue like "Jumble Sale," the charming music of "A Little Dutch Girl," and, with a quotation of a French song, "*Alors j'ai pleuré comme on pleure à vingt ans*," when she referred to Milne's "Romantic Age" (about which more anon), and Wontner's chivalrous creation, she, a fond mother of a little trio, raved over the wonderful change that had come over the "Yuletide Stage," as she called it, ever since Peter Pan became immortal by play and statue. Oh! the lovely "Shepherdess without a Heart"—how perfectly poetic, how sweet, how beautifully told in word and canvas and Frank Harvey's melodies! How Andersen would have revelled in it!—he who wrote for young and old, and gladdened both in an understanding equal to all ages, and is interpreted by Bertram Forsyth and his acolytes with all the imagination contained in that wondersome word "fairy-tale." She had not yet seen the great pantomime at Covent Garden, but she had

been to the Lyceum and enjoyed "The Babes in the Wood"—what progress since yesteryears! No crude jokes about the bottle and its fumes, but humour wholesome and fresh; fairy-children playing with all the joy of living of youth; dancers galore in fine frill and graceful figures; a chorus of urchins and adolescents singing like gay little birds; a fairy godmother (Nan Stuart) with the warble of a prima donna—everything from gorgeous scenery to discreet colouring of costumes—so neat, so fanciful, so full of life and liveliness.

"And what about acting?" I interposed. "What do you say about the London stage as to its interpreters, you who know the theatre of two worlds—or rather, three, Europe and the two Americas?" "Just as I feel? Quite candid?" she asked. "Don't be afraid; there is no compromise in art—say exactly what you mean?" "Well," she continued, "there is no finer acting in the world than our men display: I would go as far as to say that our male actors are *nulli secundi*, and nowhere do you find such perfect gentlemen in attire, in manner, and in restraint of emotion, which is more powerful than the *bravura* so beloved on the Continent and the hustle-bustle in America." She went into parts and names; she quoted tragedians, comedians, character players—there is nothing which our men cannot achieve. There is as much temperament in the British actor as in any of his Continental brethren; there is merely a difference of diapason. We prefer organ tunes to the blare of brass. "And our actresses?" "Ah, there's the rub! Beauty we have unrivalled; refinement ditto; distinction, a great deal; cleverness galore; but greatness—real greatness that electrifies an audience, that would lead to ovations outside the theatre and the unharnessing of horses, there is none. Our actresses lack the *grand trait*: their tragic scenes miss grandeur; somehow one feels the touch of the *bourgeoise*—a turmoil in a suburb instead of in the universe. I have seen some beautiful acting in London, I have felt moments of emotion, but I have never been carried away to the degree of heroine-worship which, like an indefinable charm, haunted me after a creation by Sarah, by Duse, by Segond-Weber, or the Dutch Theo Mann. Somehow, our actresses seem afraid to let themselves go—seem too ladylike or too

middle-classy to break the walls down. They fill one with admiration often enough, but they do not overwhelm one by the same power of personality which is the gift of some of our men. I could name many plays of world's fame which, even though I am not a professional worker in the theatre, I could 'cast' at a glance beyond a fault where the men are concerned; but as to the women, I should have to borrow Diogenes' lantern lest I should fall short in my search for completeness."

"Thanks," I said. "I wish I were a maker of records, so that your words should be repeated wherever the London stage is discussed. For you have expressed, in the main, the opinions of many."

"He stands on his own plane, and on this plane he stands alone." I remember this phrase well: it was applied by a London critic—for aught I know it may have been myself; you lose count when you have reviewed some six or seven thousand plays in thirty-five years—to the work of a man who has since become world-famed. And it seems particularly apt in the case of Mr. A. A. Milne, who in "The Romantic Age" has given us the most delectable stage-fantasy since Rostand joyed France and the rest of the globe with "Les Romanesques." A. A. Milne is the man we have been waiting for—a successor to Oscar Wilde. But there is this great difference between the two: Wilde, except in "The Importance of Being Earnest," hitched the art of the conversationalist to the craft of an elaborate plot; Milne, modern in the most irresponsible sense of the term, almost disdains the notion of plot, and weaves lace of words, wit, and humour in fanciful design and endless maze of lines and side-lines. His plays are things of gossamer; the critical scalpel could easily make lint of them, when thinking of logic, common-sense, reality. But what a pity it would be thus to spoil a little world where all is sunshine, lightness, imagination, love—the little world in which we all wish to live away from the high-road of toil and moil and worry! "*La jeunesse n'a qu'un temps*," says a French poet, but he forgot that some possess the divine gift of making us all young for a little while, and that is what Mr. Milne does in his "Romantic

Age," of which Arthur Wontner is the *preux chevalier* and Miss Lottie Venne the fairy godmother.

The great pantomime, "Cinderella," in gay exile at Covent Garden because "The Garden of Allah" defies all seasons at Drury Lane, is a thing of beauty: how could it be otherwise when Arthur Collins sways the magic wand of his inexhaustible imagination! The *scène-à-faire* at the end of the first part is an incomparable spectacle. Mr. Collins evidently loves flowers, and his children's ballet, with little bushes in rare prismatic grouping, the living bed of flowers, the bower of a myriad blossoms with the pumpkin in the centre whence emerges Cinderella's chariot as radiant as Apollo's sun-cart—that tableau is worthy of the vision of a great painter. Indeed, as a show in the artistic sense of the word, the pantomime has never been more resplendent, more tasteful, more discreet in colouring or realistic in build and form. But it is a pity that Mr. Arthur Dix, the librettist, has not added the "joy for ever" to the "thing of beauty." Frankly, the sweet tale is baldly told without a touch of poetry in the narrative, and the vein of humour is much in need of strengthening life-blood. The task of the exponents was stupendous during a traffic which lasts as long as the journey from Calais to Paris: the charming Miss Marie Blanche, the winsome Miss Kathlyn Hilliard, the accomplished Harry Claff, the new humourist Miss Lily Long (whose song "Miss Maisie of Piccadilly" was the vocal bull's-eye of the evening), the quaint Egberts—and all the rest of the baron's family—worked like Trojans to extract fun and romance from anæmic material. Hence, curious to note, the honours fell to a wonderful circus horse, and to the acrobats, the Penders. No doubt Mr. Arthur Collins will apply his nimble wit to burnish the text. When that is done, the pantomime will settle down into opulent wellbeing.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—January 15th, 1921.

A "Preux Chevalier." "The Beggar's Opera." A Yiddish Theatre.

SPECULATION was rife. There was to be an actor in the Honours List on New Year's Day. Who could it be? Everybody weighed and guessed—and all were wrong, for the elect was far away on the high-seas to conquer a British Dominion for British Art. Then, when we read that a knighthood had been conferred on Mr. Martin Harvey, we tapped our foreheads and said: "Of course! How could we be so stupid not to think of him?" And we added: "He deserves it." For Martin Harvey, by name, art, and benevolence, appeals to our imagination, and in the provinces he is an idol. He shares with Matheson Lang the mantle of Lewis Waller. He is "the romantic actor"; not to have seen him in "The Only Way" is as clear a want in education as to have missed Waller as Monsieur Beaucaire. And then there is his Hamlet; the romantic Hamlet *par excellence*; the Hamlet young girls dream of, and whom men admire for his rhetorical splendour, his ringing voice—a big voice, raising a small man to command and above the shoulders of his surroundings. Again, there is Martin Harvey the orator: hear him after dinner on his art, and you are carried away by his enthusiasm, his conviction, his aptness of expression—he wafts the spirit of romance. Above all, there is the man, a lovable creature with a big heart, who has devoted endless hours to charity in war-time, and who, night after night when he produced Maeterlinck's "Burgomaster of Stillemonde," harangued the crowds all over England to plead for Belgium, for patriotism, and open-handedness. Thus the knightly honour was bestowed on him for a double cause—for what he has done as an artist and what he has amassed in an altruistic cause. Not since King George touched Frank Benson with the sword in the stage-box of Drury Lane has the theatrical world had such a surprise and such pleasure.

It is late in the day to refer to "The Beggar's Opera," which has confirmed the Lyric Opera House at Hammersmith in public favour, and has given the *coup de grâce* to the obsolete notion of unlucky theatres.

There is no such thing as an unlucky theatre—there are only unlucky managers selecting unlucky pieces. Generally, the public appreciates a good thing wherever it is to be found—did we not once upon a time migrate to Camberwell, when Mr. Mulholland made it a font of “new and original” work? Still, the success of “The Beggar’s Opera” many months after its *début* is remarkable and gratifying, in the patriotic sense of the word. It proves that the nation has an innate love of its folklore in text and music; that there is a treasure-trove in the old play-box of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and—that there is nothing new under the histrionic sun. Half the battle was, of course, won by Mr. Playfair’s production—now adopted by America in a rare unison of approval—and by excellent exponents of his choice. The other half, methinks, is due to the *flair* of the public, which in “The Beggar’s Opera” not only discovered the origin of musical comedy, but one with a wittier text and ever so much more musical music than is served up now by a round half-dozen of librettists and composers. That Mr. Ranalow’s Macheath is a masterly creation need hardly be re-said: he is the d’Artagnan of roguery; nor need we re-sing the praises of Elsie French’s delectable Mrs. Peachum, and of Miss Violet Marquesita’s sinister charm as Lucy Lockit. But a hearty welcome should be given to the newcomer, Miss Katherine Arkandy, the new Polly, as dainty as a piece of Saxony, as piquant as the most piquant Louis XV. soubrette, who has a voice of very sweet timbre and a schooling of such perfection that she tempts one to name her in the same breath as Miss Maggie Teyte. An evening at the Lyric, Hammersmith, is an experience and a study. The public consists of all sorts and conditions of men and women—all classes foregather here in the most extraordinary mixture of styles, modes and manners—but, from the moment the orchestra begins, to the last parade of all the actors concerned, there is a “*Stimmung*” in the house nowhere else to be found. It is the complete harmony of “Englishness”—the family-feeling which is created by the understanding that this play and this music are truly racial of the soil.

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Plans are in the air to endow West London with a Yiddish Theatre. It sounds interesting, but one feels inclined to repeat *Punch's* warning to those about to marry. In New York, which is the focus of Jewry from all countries in the world, it may flourish alongside the German Theatre (recently reopened), the French, and the countless little theatres *à côté*, Guignols of a kind and with a difference; but New York is essentially cosmopolitan, and London, despite the many foreigners in our midst, remains the city of one language. This is not sheer assertion, it is the outcome of actual experience. A French theatre over here may draw full houses for a month, but for a season—it costs money. In the beginning of the century, we had a regular German theatre—it cost money. We had, in war-time, at the Criterion, on sharing-terms (thus practically rent free), a very fine series of fine plays, including Fonson and Wicheler's famous "Kommandatur"—it cost money. Even Réjane, when at the Court, lamented—it cost money; and I am informed, by one who knows, that when Moscovitch was the hero of the Pavilion East, the end of the story was a *da capo* of the same cry of negative financial success. The truth of the matter is that a Yiddish theatre in Western Europe can only live when it is established on a very small scale, and even then its existence is ephemeral, except in the case of the famous Herrenfeld Theater of Berlin, which manufactured diverting Potash and Perlmutter plays on its own premises, and had a following because the Berliners are nearly all able to understand the vernacular, which, to an average Londoner, sounds more foreign than French and Italian. Even in Amsterdam, with its vast Ghetto, there is no permanent Yiddish theatre; and in Antwerp, where the diamond industry has attracted many of the Chosen, there are two little *boîtes* near the station—"flea-hives" a wag called them, on account of the untidiness of the public—where Yiddish plays are performed in semi-amateur way.

Now what would be the prospect in London? At first, curiosity would no doubt fill the stalls and the other high-priced seats, and pit and gallery would, of course, be well patronised by Jewry. But do the promoters of the West-End Yiddish Theatre really believe that in the

long run the public would pay considerable prices to hear "Uriel Acosta" by Gutzkow (of which, by the way, Zangwill years ago was to make an adaptation for Sir Herbert Tree), or Lessing's "Nathan der Weise," which, if accessible at all to the English public—a doubtful surmise—would sound far more poetic and dignified in English blank-verse? Of course, there are the "pogrom" plays, very poignant in the days of Tsar-ridden Russia—but pogroms are no longer burning questions, and there is reason to believe that they belong to the past; there are the plays of Jewish humour—"chein" is the word beloved by Israel—but how much of it would be understood by the son of Cockayne and by the new Jewish population which has found refuge in England since the great exodus from the East, and whose parlance differs vastly from the time-honoured Yiddish? No; I fear, well-intentioned as the experiment is, it would be doomed to disappointment; for, granted that the Jews, most of whom are in modest circumstances, would patronise the national enterprise and fill pit and gallery night by night, there is no hope of making two ends meet in these days of exorbitant rents and expenses. The days when theatrical enterprise could live on pit and gallery are past and done with, like many other boons and blessings of a happier world.

CHAPTER XXXIX.—January 22nd, 1921.

"The Betrothal." "Charm."

WHEN on Saturday, January 8, I witnessed the triumphant celebration of "The Betrothal," by Maurice Maeterlinck, at the Gaiety, my thoughts wandered back a span of nearly thirty years. For almost on the same spot, where then stood the old Opéra Comique, I, in youthful ardour and foolhardiness, had sponsored the cause of Maeterlinck. His name was then in the ascendant; he was much admired and much derided; Comyns Carr had called him a very Belgian Shakespeare; the younger men at the time, fortified by the publication of "La Princesse Maleine" by Mr. Heinemann, went into raptures. At ladies' clubs, would-be blue stockings whispered the names of Hauptmann—Sudermann—Maeterlinck—oh! the fun and ignorance of it!—one breath for three men "poles asunder"! So I thought the time ripe to let our earnest students of drama see what Maeterlinck really was on the stage, and I arranged with Lugné Poë, the famous creator of the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in Paris, still the *vedette* of all that is remarkable in international drama, to come over with his company and to produce "La Princesse Maleine" under the joint banners of "l'Œuvre" and the Independent Theatre. Our expectations ran high; we hoped that London would flock to worship the exquisite performance of Suzanne Després and her husband, Lugné Poë.

And this is how London answered the call of Art! In the stalls, seventeen people—mostly Press. In the boxes, one party—mine. In the pit, a fair muster of Independents and habitual first-nighters. In the dress-circle, here and there a face, but mainly grins of vacant seats. In the upper-circle the same void. But the gallery was full—here were the boys and girls who never failed the pioneer, here were many members of the Playgoers' Club, ever welcome guests of the Independent Theatre. But the desert in the house did not damp the ardour of the performers, the audience shouted themselves hoarse and clapped their hands into blisters; the Press, as usual divided in appraisal of merit—there were those who still looked upon Maeterlinck as a *fumiste*!—lauded the performance to the skies. If we had had

the money to pursue, if a Mæcenas had been found, which never occurred until Miss Florence Farr captured an anonymous "backer" for her season at the Avenue (it turned out later to be Miss Horniman, the fairy-godmother of the Repertory Movement started at Manchester), we might have gone on. But Poë had no means for London experiments, and the coffers of the Independent Theatre, mainly lined by my personal obligations, were drained beyond drainage—so we had to be content with artistic laurels and financial disaster. And that was that.

But, ever since, Maeterlinck has spread like wildfire, and both Tree and Mrs. Campbell launched the argosy of which we had laid the keel. In 1921 all London was at the Gaiety to pay homage to the great poet. The majority came, I think, with preconceived intentions to praise, for a Barker production, with scenery and costumes by Charles Ricketts, music by a young Englishman, C. Armstrong Gibbs, and the lavish hands of Grossmith and Laurillard granting *carte blanche* to luxury beyond the dreams of avarice—what could it be otherwise than a feast of beauty? And so it was. In fairyland dwelt the vast imagination of Charles Ricketts; in fairyland, the charm of Carlotta Mosetti, our one girl dancer who can vie with men; in fairyland, the music of Armstrong Gibbs, often reminiscent of Debussy's lace-work; in fairyland, the unseen yet ubiquitous guidance of Granville Barker, who succeeded in imbuing all his actors with the spirit of phantasmagoria—all? well, not all, but I would not be ungracious and describe my vision of the fairy Berylune. Still, Miss Stella Campbell's Light was fanciful and inspired; Miss Gladys Cooper's veiled Joy was statuesque and anon a sight for the gods; Ivan Berlyn's Destiny, so weirdly beheld by Tytyl, was a magnificent *tour de force* in its dwindling from giantdom to a midget; and Bobbie Andrews, in the most difficult, somewhat passive part of the Boy Hero, was all that the poet could desire, because he was all youth and no affectation.

So the vision was perfect: there remains the play; and on this point the great reputation of Maeterlinck warrants candour. I have read it in French, in Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, our most distinguished translator's, faceted English, and now I have heard it. The threefold

impression unified into the same opinion. It is not a remarkable work ; its symbolism is *tour de force*, and often irreconcilable with the simple mind of a Belgian "campine"-boy, most unsophisticated and uneducated of mortals : verily, were it not signed by a world-famous name would it have attracted universal attention ? I for one cannot compare it with a fairy-play of home-growth, "The Shepherdess Without a Heart." The one is a painted lily ; the other—our own of Bertram Forsyth—a simple flower of the field of intuitive imagination. There are spots of beauty in "The Betrothal" : the scene in which the veiled bride clasps to her bosom the child of her dreams reminds one, in flight of fancy and poetry of thought, of the touching episode in "The Miracle" when the Madonna fondles her little God-sent babe. Again, there is true poesy in the boy's perfunctory courting of the six maidens ready to be the elect, while his mind is filled with the blurred picture of the ideal woman, whom he has not seen. But against this, how much there is in the dream which is forced philosophy, "*voulu*," dragged in for want of greater invention ; how much there is wholly beyond the crude adolescent mind and inaccessible to the understanding not only of children, but even of grown-ups unless, in purblind worship of a Master, they seek explanation without consideration of conscience ? Thus the ancestral nonsense in the selection of a mate ; thus the amusing but also ludicrous dwarfing of Destiny ; thus the appearance of the unborn children which, indelicate in "The Blue Bird," becomes a pretty picture, yet an absurd one, in "The Betrothal." A fairy-tale, I take it, has for object to appeal to all sorts and conditions of ages, and primordially it must be seen *à travers le tempérament*—in English, through the eyes of the young generation. It must, therefore, be as clear as crystal and as simple as thought uninfluenced by experience. In a word, the hearer must realise that what is supposed to happen in the boy's dream must be such as is consistent with his immature conception of life. In "The Betrothal" there is but a fragment of this archaic simplicity ; there is an almost total absence of humour, and what there is of it seems forced ; and there is a great deal of specious philosophy which carries no palpable message at all, except to those "high-brow" Poloniuses

who, to please the Hamlet of their worship, would see things against their better belief. Thus, in the case of "The Betrothal," it is the display which enchants us, not the play.

In contrast to Maeterlinck's effort, it is pleasant to turn to an unpretentious play of American origin. "The Charm School," adapted from Alice Duer Miller's book, is a little comedy of no pretence, but undeniable charm. It is also a fairy-tale masquerading in the garb of modern life. In scheme it is all make-belief, moonshine and romance; in action it has an air of comely reality, gently illuminated with the pleasant humour of youthful adventure. A mere boy inherits a girls' school—he is not equipped to lead, but he will undertake the stupendous task. The very notion is comic. What must that boy feel among these wagging tongues and waving skirts of a dozen sweet damsels! The inevitable happens of course: one of the girls just on the fringe of romance sets her cap at him. It is all as light as a feather and as fantastic as if the world were an Eden instead of a vale of tears. But it lays hold of you. And as Owen Nares is an ideal "boy" to play a lover—even from a man's point of view; as Miss Meggie Albanesi, with her dark eyes, her charming face, her winsome, restrained ways, is exactly the girl that would steal a man's heart and turn his head; as Miss Fairbrother's wooed and wooing spinster is second blooming *in excelsis*—there is no more to be said.

CHAPTER XL.—January 29th, 1921.

The Play-Actors. Hay-Makers. Foreign Plays in Paris.

THE Play-Actors, that excellent combination of actors and actresses which, thanks to the energies of Mr. Henry Oscar and Mr. George Lingner, has resumed its promising activities with unabated ardour, did not only begin its season well by the production of the late Harold Chapin's last and ablest work, "The New Morality," but it has added to its reputation and rendered a service to the progressive drama of the country by giving a hearing to Mr. Hamilton Fyfe. In one word, his morality, "The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory," is an achievement of mental nobility. It is original to the degree of boldness; it is timely; it impels introspection; it proclaims without fear or favour the futility of the three fetishes that blind the vision of men; it hallows love as the one and only quality of redemption and reconstruction. In the vein of satire the author divests kings of purple and bares them into mere puppets; in the vein of demonstration that power is but a satellite of circumstances, he proves that war may be caused by an untoward gunshot in a frontier incident; in the vein of tragedy he humbles a great warrior into dotage and ordains the tottering human remnant to be dressed up in his glittering uniform and orders, to be honoured by picture and statue, in order that his outward glory may catch more men for the army of his country, while the poor mannikin has ceased to care for and to understand the lustre of life and meanders about his bodily needs—the caress of his mistress, who is a harridan, and a dish of rabbit pie. *Sic transit!*

This is the theme, but there is much more in this play where we meet all sorts and conditions of rulers—from the vainglorious and the inept, to the Prince who understands both love and life and becomes imbued with the democratic spirit; from the Ministers, the masters of the situation, who govern for the welfare of their country, to those who are mere climbers in the democratic cause and become greedy of titles and honours when *vox populi* has raised them to presidential power. Although Mr. Fyfe has hidden countries and identities under assumed names, there is an imaginary representation of the Concert of Europe,

as it played in complete want of harmony before the fateful days of 1914. Those conversant with history and historical figures could easily point to graphic portrayals of Sovereigns and Prime Ministers and Generals—for Mr. Fyfe knows: he has seen and spoken to many who were men of light and leading. He indulges in caricature, but he also maintains veracity: he has peeled his victims for us and shows the often indifferent kernel hidden under a resplendent skin.

Within an ace the morality would have gone home with the power of a shell. During two acts we were deeply impressed; we admired the daring of the thing as well as the kaleidoscopic manysidedness of the execution. Here indeed was the secret revealed that no one is a hero to his valet; and when, in the third act, Mr. Fisher White gave a picture of the crestfallen, benighted General, so pathetic, so true, so painfully exposing the vanity of all human glory, that we felt a lump in our throat—in the third act, the arch-enemy of dramatic effect, anti-climax, suddenly, as it were, cut the current of interest. It was a mere nothing—the iteration of proletarian talk by servants in the midst of a crisis. It was the ominous error frequently committed in a play with a purpose to emphasise a point. A few strokes of the blue pencil could have remedied it. But somehow is passed unobserved at the dress-rehearsal, and the oversight disturbed the balance. Such are the (mis)fortunes of dramatic warfare. But what of it, after all? It does not affect the character of the work, which is full of thought, rich in characterisation, lofty in aim, monumental in design; a work to be seen first, then to be read and pondered over, since its *envoi* bears on the destiny of mankind—kingdom, power, glory, and the super-ruler of them all, the divine omnipotence of love.

In a cast of many, some stood out, all worked with a will. Masterly were the portrayals of Mr. Julius Knight, as close a reincarnation of William II., as well can be imagined; of Mr. Bruce Winston, akin to Francis Joseph; of Mr. Halliwell Hobbs, akin to Count Berchtold; of Mr. James Dale, as the prince who understood his people as King Albert understands his: of Mr. D. Lewin Mannering, the most distinguished ambassadorial type conceivable, a Paul Cambon both in physique and

grandeur of manners. Withal, an impressive performance of an impressive play; caviare, I fear, in the regular routine of a London theatre, but destined to further the cause of our drama in many lands across the Channel.

Ian Hay makes his sunshine where he finds it, *à la Molière*. If you would pick his "Safety Match" to pieces, you would find bits of Robertson, of Dickens, of Thackeray, eke of the Irish of the Abbey and G.B.S. You would also find a strange "change of tenses," now comedy, now wild farce, now melodrama, now fairy-tale. But why be so cruel when you have a fair entertainment by an author out to amuse you? There is no pretence in this little story of the Juggernaut of forty-five who wedded his early autumn to flaming June and found the truth that there are no roses without thorns. That he afterwards made the conquest of his wife by heroism and self-sacrifice was all to his credit, and to Mr. Bouchier's, who was admirable.

Brisson, the critic of the Paris *Temps*, has spoken a word in season. He has admitted the insularity of the French stage, where foreign plays, except in theatres *à côté*, rarely obtain a hearing. And he has advocated the establishment of an International Theatre in order to make the Parisians better acquainted with the trend of modern drama abroad. *Comœdia*, the daily organ of the theatre in Paris, has turned the question into a symposium, and, if a vote were taken, the odds are that such an institution as proposed by Brisson would have had a lukewarm reception. The general consensus is—it might be tried, but is it worth trying when all is well in the best of all worlds—when our own playwrights are turning out plays as swiftly as the Bolsheviks print banknotes, and when a long file of the young generation is knocking vainly at stage-doors?

Of course, some of the men of the hour, who are ever in demand, in order not to appear too rapacious of royalties, extend a lame welcoming hand to the idea. They seem to say: "*Pourquoi pas?*"—it is no concern of ours, we shouldn't worry." Never seems there to be a necessity for seeking abroad what is grown at home in abundance. When one

thinks of a Sacha Guitry, who at thirty-five has already written seventy-three plays ; or of Verneuil, the author of " Daniel," who at twenty-seven confesses to twenty-three plays, one can but conjecture what the annual output may be in a country where every self-respecting *collégien* begins at sixteen with a tragedy in five acts and in verse !

Still, the outside observer, who contemplates the French stage in a less chauvinistic spirit than those who rule it, would not be slow to admit that a little fresh international air, a little less triangle, sex, and sordidness would raise the standard. As a London critic who recently made the run of Parisian theatres remarked : " Of course the French theatre is always amusing, but it does seem to stand still." The bill changes, but the nature of the play does not. It seems to turn in the vicious circle of adultery and eroticism ; it is fragrant with perfume, and it would be all the better for a blast from the north and the north-west—from Scandinavia, Holland, Germany, where there is at least an effort to get away from the rut and the groove. Even from England the French drama might take a lesson : a few Galsworthy plays would be a tonic and a revelation to the Parisians.

But I believe that an International Theatre would have in London ten chances to succeed against one in Paris, and that is—the main chance. In other words, if the International Theatre of Paris is to come, it must pin its faith to Mæcenas and his money, not to the man in the street, who is content with what is French in the spirit of Victor Hugo, who would have the world believe that every man has two countries—his own and then " la France." -

CHAPTER XLI.—February 5th, 1921.

The Eloquence of G.B.S. The Policy of Leon M. Lion.

AT the Haymarket Theatre on January 24th, where we foregathered by invitation of the Drama League, the withering eloquence of "G.B.S." annihilated the arguments in favour of a seven-days' theatre—in other words, Sunday performances, as on the Continent, and no rest for the actor. The cause had able defendants in Mr. Arthur Bouchier—prime mover of the pro-opening party—and a distinguished cleric, whose name escapes me, but who very broad-mindedly averred that the question hinged, not on religion, but on economics. Mr. Bouchier—who, if I remember well, was once the fierce opponent of the theatre on Sundays—now painted the enfranchisement of the holiday in glowing colours. Happiness of the people—no more "pub." and hanging about; happiness of the actors, for there would be liberal extra pay on the Sabbath. "Would there?" rustled a murmur through the serried ranks of the actors in the auditorium, for by this time they are as wary as the raven in La Fontaine's fable: *jura mais un peu tard*, etc. They know these glowing managerial promises; it was thus that matinées began, and ended in fragmentary half-pay and much more work. So when Shaw rode in with his common-sense and his sarcasm, a speech as brilliant as ever poured from his lips, and when a workman (one of the stage-hands) somewhat too vehemently, but not without conviction, declared that during the week he saw practically nothing of his people, it was a foregone conclusion that the motion "against" would be carried by a sweeping majority. And so it happened.

Mr. Arthur Bouchier took his defeat with good grace like a man; and, resourceful as he is, it may have occurred to him on the way home that, if in one way he was a loser, in another he might be a winner and gather laurels for his thistles. We all remember that lately he wanted to give Shakespearean Sunday performances in aid of charity. Why does he not persevere and widen this idea for the benefit of the people? Why does he not endow London with a Sunday Theatre of good English plays at prices accessible to all persons? It would be not only a boon and a blessing for the masses, but it would be hailed as a haven and a

stepping-stone by the unemployed actors thirsting for glory and clamouring for work. The capital outlay would be comparatively small ; it could be simplified by co-operation. Most of the Sunday theatres on the Continent work on sharing terms, and, if the actors were engaged for a series of Sundays during the year, it would mean a nice little certainty to those who are all too often unemployed, and a welcome strengthening of funds for those who are greedy for more work beyond the daily routine—which, after all, is an individual question. Of the success of such performances, from Shakespeare to Pinero, Shaw, and all the rest of the modern men of mark, there could be no doubt. And, since we have heard that the Church is no longer an antagonist, but an ally, the patronage would be swelled by a good many who hitherto would not have dared to enter a theatre on Sunday, lest it should have reflected on their reputation as good Christians. Moreover, if Mr. Bourchier could see his way to set the project on a business footing, and appeal for the cause of the people to start the enterprise with a fund, I believe that men in the City, besides well-to-do people in the West End and suburbs, would gladly help with donations whereby both actors and playgoers would benefit in many ways.

At our Grand Guignol Mr. José Levy has added a remarkable little play by Mr. Maltby to his sextuple programme. At the first glance, "The Person Unknown" is a crude effort. The soldier who was lured to arms by Rubens' recruiting song under promise of hugs and kisses on his homecoming, penetrates late at night into the flat of the fair ballet-girl who enraptured him with the vision splendid. He now is disfigured and hideous to behold, "with a caricature of a face," and he comes to exact the ransom. There is intense contrast in the picture : the glad homecoming of the girl and her comrades from a masked ball ; the increased joy in the small hours by the flowing cup ; then, as the day faintly breaks, the encounter between the bedizened girl and the lovelorn man. The struggle is awful and painful ; at first I found it repellent, but when I saw the play again I felt the meaning of it. The world easily promises, easily forgets. The hero of yesterday has lost his halo : he is

a mere reminiscence. The feeling of intense pity, the feeling of enthusiasm, the feeling of interest in the fate of the men who fought and bled for us, has faded fast. The women who yesterday would have given body and soul to the soldier following the drum, look to-day upon the obligation as upon the tradesman's bill that is scrapped into the waste paper basket until the pressure and the writ come, and the rest is silence. It is this that Mr. Maltby wishes to drive home. He does it relentlessly, with needless emphasis, with a certain rawness of manner, as is his wont, and open to chastening. But, for all that, the little work grafts itself on memory and conscience, like that other poignant episode, "Eight o'Clock," by Reginald Berkeley, the more appreciated the more it is seen. It causes one to pause and think. Rightly understood, it makes for good, and kindles our feeling for those whom war has victimised for their lifetime. Miss Sybil Thorndike's transition from the gaiety of a happy evening to the awe of the early hours once more impressed us by her great versatility and power; Mr. Russell Thorndike's discreet rendering of the mutilated maniac intensified the horror, but also the sad veracity of the thing.

At the Garrick Mr. Leon M. Lion continues his long-headed policy of fighting the heavy economic conditions of the theatre by running two daily bills in tandem. While "Brown Sugar" is still doing well, he has now found another trump card in the revival of Brieux's famous "Three Daughters of M. Dupont," that powerful indictment of the bourgeois marriage of convenience in which the dowries are the goods and the woman merely a chattel. Although even in France the cause of feminism has advanced since the play was written, the main theme remains of intense interest. The outstanding figure, now as before, remains the married daughter of Miss Ethel Irving. In the great scene when the woman aching for a child, and denied her vocation by her husband's egotism (and economic considerations), breaks out in fury, invective, and searing denunciations, she carried us away as in a torrent. Breathless she screamed out her accusations; breathless we listened and felt the repercussion of her agony. It was intensely exciting,

intensely painful, and the fall of the curtain came as a relief. Then, after a moment's hush to return to reality, there was an explosion of such applause, so prolonged, so genuine in its ring of admiration and release, as is only created by temperamental power and magnetism of oratory. We were under the spell of an actress who rises to great heights when emotion overwhelms her own being. Mr. Leon M. Lion's father Dupont was also a remarkable creation. He adapted the part to his personality. For there are two ways of conceiving Dupont. Brieux probably intended him to be a big and burly person with all the attributes of a *faux bon-homme*. That would have befitted neither the stature nor the nature of Mr. Lion. So he represented him as a little man of nerves, a Micawber, as minute and restless as a squirrel, and as wayward as quarrelsome—a humorous figure, in fine, with an undercurrent of sadness and despair. It illuminates the play and the surprising many-sidedness of Mr. Lion's talent. Miss Edith Evans' picture of the ascetic daughter was pathetic in its wonderful self-effacement; and Mr. Charles Kenyon pleaded the husband's defence, in a great scene of the play, with such natural conviction that for a moment the unsympathetic character tipped the scales.

CHAPTER XLII.—February 12th, 1921.

*The Second Effort of a Prize-winner. "The Skin Game" once more.
Amateurs.*

MR. HARRY WALL'S second appearance as a playwright—this time under the wing of Mr. Arthur Wontner, and in token of a benefit for the Actors' Benevolent Fund—reminds me of the play competition of which some five years ago he was the winner. We were then in the midst of the turmoil, and, as the dramatic vein of the nation was almost sterile for a while, I suggested to Messrs. Grossmith and Laurillard that a prize and a production would perhaps reveal a "mute inglorious" new man. The proposal was accepted; the prize was to be a hundred pounds, and the play was to be given a trial at the Court Theatre. Among the judges were men well known in stageland: Henry Ainley, Frederick Whelen, H. A. Hertz; and the crop was a nice one—in quantity.

There rushed in no fewer than 264 plays, all anonymously under a motto; and, of these, twelve were to be delegated, on the selection of the experienced chief readers, Miss Emily Stone and Miss Agnes Platt, to the judges. Of the twelve the competition was narrowed down to three; and it was my duty, as umpire, to select the winner after having considered the report on each play by my distinguished fellow-sifters. Of the bulk the least said the soonest mended. I employed my leisure from time to time in perusing manuscripts at random after the readers had done with them, and, when I look back on the arid stuff that had to be waded through, I regard it as a providential ordainment that the two ladies who so valiantly laboured in the cause of our drama were not bereft of their reason. Of all the rubbish! Well, that is done with, and, although none of the twelve plays of the narrower competition revealed inordinate talent, we were at least glad to be able to arrive at unanimity in awarding the prize to "Ruts," by a young and hitherto unknown author, Mr. Harry Wall.

The play was duly produced, and, mainly thanks to the perfect performance of Miss Hilda Trevelyan as a young woman who has decided to defy the ruts of village conventions and to test life for herself, it

was a *succès d'estime*. It was not taken up by Messrs. Grossmith and Laurillard; it was not heard of again; but to a certain extent the aim was achieved. Critics and spectators agreed that here was a new man of promise, who would redeem it when he had learnt his *métier*—had mastered technique and the wisdom that too much palaver spoils a conversation. For that Mr. Wall had original ideas, a nimble wit, a certain gift of drawing characters akin to life, was apparent enough in his firstling. But it was clumsy of structure, and so long that the interest flagged and the unquenched desire for five o'clock tea damped the ardour of the audience.

Meanwhile, Mr. Wall joined the Army, and his second effort, "A Lady calls on Peter," proves that we were not so far wrong in predicting a future for him. The new comedy is an elaboration of a well-worn theme. When a fairly young author is in quest of a typist to dictate a new book; when he is pursued by a much-widowed widow whom he does not want; when by the long arm of coincidence a little country maiden from the Land of Cakes wafts into his solitude and takes on the typewriting job—a blind horse can see the inevitable. So the plot does not matter; nor is it of much importance that the author wobbles between comedy and farce. He will learn the difference, as he will learn to contrive the stories that are not quite so banal as this one. His two paramount qualities remain, characterisation and dialogue. His every character is not only deftly drawn, but it is a type; and one of them, the unimaginative suburban shorthand-writer who is matter-of-fact and *noli me tangere* in her narrow little way, is a masterly miniature played to lifelike perfection by Miss Laura Lydia. She is but a collateral figure, for Miss Hilda Trevelyan is the heroine, yet from the critic's point of view hers is the happiest creation of the author. True to her colours and her belief in Mr. Wall, Miss Hilda Trevelyan becomes the good fairy of his second venture. Capitably supported by Mr. Arthur Wontner, she is the life and soul of the play. She spreads charm. She is womanly, in all the various meanings of that significant word. Now arch, now wily, now capricious, but always winsome, she conquers hero and audience alike. She has but one little fault—and that is,

no doubt, due to her provincial experiences, where the audiences are wont to be "played at"—she sometimes underlines and emphasises her words and gestures too much. It is an exuberance of zeal, but she should not cultivate it. Her sweet self, unforced, unaffected, makes for complete easiness on both sides of the footlights.

I have paid my tribute of valediction to Galsworthy's masterly "Skin Game," and its two chief equally masterly exponents, Mr. Dawson Milward and Mr. Edward Gwenn, and once more I came away so deeply impressed that for a good long while after the curtain's fall my mind was occupied with the aspects of the play and the achievements of the actors. As an *ensemble*, the performance is so fine that it may well be held up as an example of English histrionic art of to-day. As a play, "The Skin Game" is a human document of rare value because, in spite of its inconclusive end, which the author chose designedly, it leaves us in sympathy with both enemies—the man of birth and the man of his own making. There is no author of to-day who fathoms English life so deeply, who is so wholly English in his aspect of life in general, with its traditions and its strife, as Galsworthy. What a mission it would be for a rich man who loved his England to man a company exclusively for the production of Galsworthy's plays abroad! It would do more for amity towards this Empire than all political efforts. And I would head my company with the two actors named Milward and Gwenn: the one the incarnation of the gentleman, the other of the man of the people, as hard and as true as steel. With such exponents and their retinue, we could convince a doubting world that in art and in thought the British stage and the British drama at their best are second to none.

I often wish that life were not so terribly short and full, with ever so much to learn to keep abreast; that I could oftener take a "busman's holiday" in order to discern new talent, and perhaps new plays, among the amateurs from whom so many of our well-known actors have sprung. A recent visit to the old-established Bancroft Company kindled these

inclinations, for I saw a capital performance of an original, untried play by that witty and deft amateur dramatist—*i.e.*, a real dramatist who is at the same time an amateur actor of mark—Mr. Herbert Swears. “Captain X.” is a crook play in the vein of “Arsène Lupin,” and I should not be at all astonished if after the trial trip it found its way to the regular stage. For there were several managers present, and the reception was not merely a tribute to a fellow-worker in the twofold part of playwright and player, but the outcome of genuine amusement. The whole thing is a practical joke played by a swell mobster on a *nouveau riche*. From beginning to end the farce is well knit, the excitement maintained with the observance of Sarcey’s dictum: “The drama is the art of preparation.” The acting was in some instances of first-rate West End order—indeed, Mr. Swears himself as Captain X would make a hit in an evening bill; and it was pleasant to find among the cast the promising daughter of an actress well beloved by playgoers and students—Miss Kate Rorke. Miss Zoe Cree—that is young Miss Rorke’s *nom-de-guerre*—has the voice of her mother. With experience, she will uphold the family standard.

CHAPTER XLIII.—February 19th, 1921.

“Daniel.” *English Plays Abroad.*

“SOOZAN!” “Sue-zenn!” “Suz-anne!”—at length, Suzanne : that is how the actors at the St. James’s mishandle the cosiest name of French womanhood. “Daniel” fares a little better ; there are only two varieties : Daniel *à l’Anglaise*, with the accent on the first syllable—or Daniel *à la Parisienne*, with lingering on the “ël.” These cacophonisms are mere trifles, some will say, but one has no idea how disturbing they are to a musical ear. When in a love scene or in a climax Suzanne suddenly becomes “Soozan” or “Sue-zenn,” it would seem that all the charm and fascination vanish ; and when in her supreme agony the heroine announces that she has just left her well-beloved in the “Roo La-fay-et,” we cease to believe in her rue, however sincerely her remorse may otherwise be expressed. It is time that the producer should dwell on uniformity of pronunciation when dealing with plays from foreign tongues. Mispronunciation spoils the make-believe ; and since it is already difficult enough for an English actor to jump into a French skin, great care should be taken to avoid little details which render the improbable incredible. When we hear, in a French play, an Englishman spoken of as “Sir Smith,” or “le lor’ Mère,” we laugh or we shudder, according to our tympanum ; but what a Frenchman feels when he is regaled with “Soozan,” “Roo,” or, in costume plays, “Mon-siou le Duke,” is best left beyond conjecture. And it is time that now, when our performances are often approaching the perfection of histrionic art, we should break with a bad habit which conveys the unmerited impression of slipshodness and ignorance.

Mr. Louis Verneuil, the author of “Daniel,” is twenty-seven, and he has written, so we hear, twelve plays. The latter fact is amazing ; I can well understand the former. It is a young man’s play in the best, and in the less laudatory sense of the word. It is bold, and it is somewhat brutally frank ; it is discursive and it makes for effect. When I listened to it—this strange story of infidelity and palliation of the heroine by the morphia-maniac brother of her husband, I had to press my temples very hard to take it all in ; and when I had tried to sift the torrential

dialogue, somewhat deliberately delivered by our actors, I felt as benumbed. My heavens! how these people talked, and what profusion of words they used to explain the simplest little thing! Undoubtedly this loquacity is the fruit of youthful exuberance; time will chasten and lop this exotic *flore* of speech and verbal imagery. It is, in a way, the fault of a quality. Verneuil has so much to say in wonderment of the maelstrom of life around him that he does not know when to stop. But more serious is the fact that the climax of his story hinges on a cardinal point which those who understand life cannot accept. Why should the guilty heroine preserve the compromising letters of her lover? Why should she carry them about and deliver them to her husband's brother? A French critic said: "People don't walk about with '*pieces à conviction*'"—what we should call damning circumstantial evidence. Perhaps the public, in the spell of the author's eloquence and skill in leading up to a scene, does not notice the anomaly. But it does not escape the critic—nor did it in Brussels, where the play was first produced, cheered by the audience and greatly dismembered by critics who are not coaxed into appreciating every play from Paris as heavenly manna. So it is difficult to look upon "Daniel" as anything more than the curious effort and promise of a young man who will arrive, when he sees life more clearly, and through the eyes of experience rather than through the inverted opera-glasses of much reading and some imagination.

To me the outstanding performance was that of Mr. Aubrey Smith, the reasoner of the play. It was a human picture of sense and composure, the one character indicating Verneuil's budding power of characterisation. Mr. Lyn Harding as the husband was rightly focussed, but entirely British in every aspect of manner. Miss Alexandra Carlisle, back from America with increased technical accomplishments, and with Transatlantic intonations which should be re-attuned to the British pitch, was excellent in the passive scenes. She was the "*incomprise*" bored to tears, yearning for love, to the life. But when she began to "orate" we discovered a certain punch-ball directness which is so dear to American producers, but in the calmer waters of the English stage seems a little too obvious and vehement. Miss Carlisle's charm is her voice; she must

not allow it to be forced beyond its natural tenour. Much praise has been given to Mr. Claude Rains for his impersonation of the morphinised wreck, and certainly, as a theatrical figure, it was both thrilling and poignant. It struck me, however, as more pictorial than felt, more *tour de force* than reality, more kinematographic in its restlessness than inwardly dramatic. Make-up and manner were telling to a degree, but I found his speech laboured; it did not convey the aloofness which is so peculiar to dopers in the aftermath of their enchantment. I infinitely prefer Mr. Claude Rains's creation of the *flâneur* in Gogol's "Inspector-General"—a characterisation with a touch of genius, for which he received not half as much praise as for this lesser effort.

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It is a great pleasure to chronicle the progress of the British drama abroad. Here are a few facts which so far have not been recorded in any paper. Mr. Hutchinson's "Right to Strike," after more than fifty performances at Amsterdam (where Louis de Vries gave an excellent portrayal of the leading part), has been accepted by the Royal Flemish Theatre of Antwerp, and, at the request of its director, Mr. van Kerckhoven, the leading Flemish critic, Mr. Louis Krinkels, is making a special translation of it; while Miss Philomène Jonkers, the director's wife and sole producer of all the plays—the only woman in Europe filling this part at a regular theatre—is studying all the details, so that an excellent performance may be expected. Anon, Mr. van Kerckhoven will ask Mr. John Galsworthy to let him play "The Skin Game" at the Royal Flemish Theatre; so that at length our Belgian friends will become acquainted with the master-builder among our playwrights. As I write, all Amsterdam is flocking to "The Wandering Jew," again at Louis de Vries's theatre; and so great is the enthusiasm aroused by Mr. Thurston's play that Barbarossa, the wittiest and the severest critic in that city, proclaimed in the *Telegraaf*: "This play is so far the most important event of the season—perhaps the only event of importance." What balm this must be to the soul of Temple Thurston, since so many over here have more or less conveyed to him the message that no one is a prophet in his own country—at any rate, in the critics' eyes!

GEORGE FORMBY is dead, and no one who read the news could but pause a moment and think of him in admiration and sorrow.

His was the struggle of years against the enemy within breaking him inch by inch. When the house shook with laughter, he shook with pain masked by smiles, and his anxious wife was watching in the wings lest his lungs should give out in the middle of his songs. Yet the world knew little of his sufferings: to the multitude he was the inimitable comedian, the kinsman of August in the circus, the forerunner of Charlie Chaplin. In his quaint get-up, with his short trousers, his antediluvian frock-coat, his frying-pan bowler, with an inane smile upon a would-be imbecile countenance, with a gait so uncertain that it conjured up visions of the bar and its ceaseless "rounds," he was a picture of the "compleat" village idiot. And his songs were mostly a plaintive narrative of weird adventures in which apparently everybody had the better of him, until towards the last verse the tables were turned, and the Lancastrian dodderer proved to be the "cleverest of the twain." His art seemed absolutely guileless and childish, in the vein of the Hatter's madness, but there was method in it—that wonderful form of humour which the Londoner appreciates, but cannot imitate. It was racial of the Lancastrian soil; it said a great deal in a few words; it created a type as if by the strokes of a lightning-painter; it amused and puzzled the hearer; it had the quality of the unexpected; it reminded one of the babble of children who, without effort or design of effect, utter words of wit and wisdom for which their elders would envy them. His "One of the Lads" has become a classic in the Piccadilly of *Manchester* as well as that of London. It was the happiest combination of gaiety in Bohemia and in that harder world where one works with one's "nose to the grindstone." George Formby, whose fame spread, like Chevalier's, from the old Tivoli in London, was one of the few latter-day comedians who, artists born, have created a kind of tradition (and many imitators). In popularity, he, with Lauder, Robey, and Chevalier, formed the leading quartette of the profession. He had no enemies, and he was never

criticised, for he knew his public so well that he never sang a song which he could not make go down by his personality. His was the all-conquering smile, and the way of one who—I cannot say why, but only state it—endeared himself to every man, woman, and child the very moment he toddled out of the wings with those strange features which seemed to apologise for the intrusion, and to claim the indulgence of the audience.

There is a fortune waiting for the London manager who will revive some of Lecocq's operettas. This was my reflection when, with a house-full of enthusiastic English people, I left the pretty little theatre at the Casino of Mentone. (Wouldn't we be happy to have such a little jewel-box in London? And the Azure Coast is strewn with them!) True, I remember well enough that the recent revival at Drury Lane was not as long-lived as we had expected. But there was a double reason for that. The theatre was too large, and the operatic artists, accustomed to great music and great characters, were too solemn to interpret these lightly drawn figures and that equally light-winged music. But, oh! how delicious is the music of Charles Lecocq, how infectious are his melodies, now lilting and joyful and romantic his romances in that little masterpiece "Le Jour et la Nuit"! To me, who know every note and tune, it was a study to watch the audience—all quiet, staid English people who come to Mentone to enjoy the air and the exchange—the latter a delusion and a snare, for the good Riviera folk have learned by this time how many, many francs go to the pound, and make us pay accordingly. Still, the theatre at 14.40 francs, including taxes, is cheap, and excellent at the price. Where in England does one find a sea-side theatre, with its own company, now playing operetta, now comedy, with its own *corps de ballet*, and a conductor who knows the whole répertoire from, say, Verdi and Saint-Saëns to Charpentier, and all the little operetta kings with Offenbach at their head?

Well, these English visitors looked all very grave as they entered the theatre, as is the wont of our people when they are in strange lands, and not quite sure whether they are going to be amused or bored, because they don't understand the language. But trust the muse of Lecocq

to lissom these stern features ! A chord or two of the overture, and already there is relaxation. When the first romance is heard, with which the older portion of the visitors is familiar, heads begin to nod as if to say to their neighbour : " Do you remember ? " Anon, when the air of " Les Portugais sont toujours gais," which once upon a time ran through all Europe, conjures up pictures of a happy-go-lucky land, where to-morrow may take care of itself, we get a little effect not unlike that at the Vaudeville at home. We dare not quite sing *viva voce* after the manner of " Kitty at the Cowshed," but we hear pianissimo here, there, everywhere the gentle refrain, partly because it is so nice to hum, partly because it shows how familiar we are with the operetta of the French. And so it goes on amidst thunders of applause, and those who understand both music and the language come away and say that the play was as good as the tunes, and what a pity that we have not got *that* sort of thing in London instead of the jingles of musical comedy, and so on, and so forth.

Making allowances for the holiday-mood, when we are inclined to dub every goose a swan, and in this neighbourhood to eat goat's flesh in the firm belief that it is lamb, I feel convinced that, with the librettos properly smartened up and brought up to date, the great English public, too, would listen once more to all the pretty things which gladdened the world a generation ago. Nor is the reason far to seek. The composers of the operetta, whether their name be Offenbach, Lecocq, Planquette, Audran, and Lacomé—oh ! also dear Lacomé ; can anyone forget the lovely " Ma Mie Rosette," with Eugène Oudin as Henri IV.—were real musicians : their scores were as artistically written as their melodies were imaginatively conceived. The librettists, too, were men of inventive power : the stories were connected, and compact and coherent ; not a mere haphazard thing with a long tail and very little head. Men like Meilhac, like Scribe, like Sardou, did not disdain to write the libretti, and some of the lesser providers of the " *genre* " were generally vaudeville-writers who were as proud of working for a Lecocq as for the Palais-Royal.

In this pleading for a return to the operetta I am by no means reactionary. Even in the hey-day of musical comedy, I predicted its renaissance, and now that Revue, that *pis-aller* mainly due to the frivolity of the war-mind, is on its last legs (except at the Vaudeville, which is a *genre à part* and excellent), I foresee that the lighter muse will make a triumphal re-entry. And so long as, for reasons best known to managers, there is apprehension lest the works of late enemies would be taboo—although “The Little Dutch Girl,” by Emmerich Kalman; and “Sybil,” by Victor Jacobi, would prove the contrary—it may be a useful hint to remind our theatres that there is a treasure trove in French operetta which casts all the modern products of Vienna and Budapest into the shade. Lecocq, Planquette, Lacomme, Hervé, Audran—think of these names, and the very reminiscence will turn your memories into an aviary! For, as in other arts, the French past-masters in music revelled in the joy of living.

CHAPTER XLV.—March 5th, 1921.

"A Cabaret!" *The Right of Rejoinder.*

HERE is a rare chance for a young man with ambition and artistic taste. The other day I talked to a manager of a great hotel not a thousand miles from Piccadilly Circus. "Well, how are things?" said I. And he replied: "Things are not what they were; we have plenty of room for more company, and I am on the look-out for a new idea to draw people to my hotel—a splendid one, is it not?" "Splendid indeed," I admitted; "and I have a splendid idea for you, which will fill your coffers and be the talk of London." His face suddenly beamed like a city in illumination. "What is this philosopher's stone?" "A Cabaret!" I exclaimed. "A real high-class, poetic, musical, terpsichorean Cabaret, such as is the boast of every great European city except our London." The argument waxed animated and fervent. The pros and cons flew across the room: my aim was to convince him that a former effort in the West End did not count for anything at all. It was started by a woman of great talent, but who did not quite understand London values and London people. She had, indeed, a promising committee at her side, but she would not let it "commit" itself to any extent. She would have her own way, and she attracted the wrong sort of talent. Its programme was, between flashes of real art in minstrelsy and dancing, something not much better than that of a "*beuglant*" in Montmartre—the oddest people with the oddest manners exhibited, in the name of cabaret, words and acts which might be deemed offensive when they were not ludicrous. The place became the haunt of that peculiar world of pleasure which loves the bizarre, and dotes upon the eccentric. There were sometimes wild "ragging" scenes, and, despite high prices for supper and refreshments, it generally happened that feasting went on till dawn. So things continued, but the end was bound to come, although the scheme might have succeeded if conducted on the right lines. Finally, this haunt of misguided joy returned to its pristine respectability as a warehouse.

Thus ended the lamentable story of a London Cabaret, and the blow has stunned other feeble attempts at revival ever since, because

those who took the idea in hand had no notion of the real *raison d'être* of the art of the modern troubadour. Yet it is a great and fine art when rightly understood. As I write, all France is ringing with the praise of a little volume of cabaret poetry by Raoul Ponchon: all the youth of France is quoting refrains from his war songs, his folklore, his love lyrics, his little rhapsodies and elegies of the people from the Luxembourg to the backwash of La Villette and the Halles. And Raoul Ponchon is but one of a band of singers, albeit that now by acclamation he is crowned as their laureate. All the young musicians, all the young poets, are proud to be heard on the little stages of tiny theatres in the luminous city, for they know that they are spring-boards of fame; they know that the Thespian car climbs from small beginnings; they know that popularity is achieved neither by a good Press nor in printed form, but by the lips of the people. Success at the cabaret means that one may be sung into glory, and that from there to the Odéon and the Comédie Française, *il n'y a qu'un pas*. Did not Maurice Donnay, to name one of the great, start at the Chat Noir under the ægis of that quaint grand-seigneur-cabaretier, Rudolphe de Salis, who received crowned heads as if he were a king and they mere lieges? Did not Donnay spring from the Quartier de la Butte to the Cupola of the Académie Française via the Vaudeville, the Gymnase, and the Comédie Française?

"Yes; but in London——" my interlocutor tried to stem my flood of enthusiasm.

"In London!" I exclaimed. "Why should we not have in London what Paris can offer? Ask Frank Rutter, with his phalanx of the young men of Art and Letters in his vanguard; ask the editors of the 'Varsity magazines, of the Chelsea Revues; peep into the Poetry Shop in Marylebone and see the stacks of songs panting to be sung. As for music, just broach the idea to Theodore Holland, to Howard Carr, to 'That' Tate, to Mark Hambourg, and to Max Darewski; I just pick at random among 'Savages' and other brethren of lyre and lute. As for dancing, just ask Ruby Ginner, Italia Conti, and Florence Etlinger what they could do if in the centre of London they had a little temple

of art where they could reveal the burgeoning talent bursting with ambition in their academies. Why, London is literally chock-a-block full of potential cabaret talent. Nor need we stop there. What about the Magic Circle, with its wizards and its high priests of the occult, thought-reading, transmission? What about the painters, the cartoonists, from Hassall to 'Poy'? What about the influx of dancers from Russia, Poland, and the East? Why, it is a Golconda, and——"

"And," cried the hotel manager, carried away by my *fata morgana*, "bring me the man who will harness this current, and I will give you hospitality, light, and the flowing bowl. Yes; it might be a gold-mine, with the Upper Ten and Bohemia flocking to it like Klondike. But bring me the man."

"Ah, there you have me, *mon pauvre ami*. If I had the man, I could bring him to you at once; but it is not a task to be undertaken by Tom, Dick, or Harry. He must be an artist, he must be a man of the world, he must be a business-man, he must have a name to command confidence, for our poets and our minstrels will not again be drawn to associate themselves with any project of the kind that fails to gauge aright the needs of its public. Frankly, I have not found the man, but I will tell you what I will do. I will sound the bugle in *The Illustrated London News*, and invite those who feel that they are made of the stuff to lead a cabaret to hand in their names and their credentials. If I spot the right man for the place, I will bring him to you. Will you be the man of your word?"

"*Parole d'honneur!*" he said. "If you will bring me the man, I pledge myself to open the cabaret whenever you like at the Hotel—— But no, you must not give the name of the hotel until you have the man."

Once more, here is a rare chance for one of the young generation.

You know that in France there exists a law which entitles a man to respond to criticism in exactly double the space in which he has been criticised. Thank goodness! we have not come to that in England yet. But with our neighbours the law is enforced with ruthless energy,

as the *Revue des Deux Mondes*—still the most interesting revue in the world—learned to its cost. Recently it published a rather scathing article on a translation of an Æschylus play by two authors. The collaborators furiously claimed the “right to reply.” The *Revue* demurred—hence action. Judgment was given in favour of the plaintiffs, and this is its effect. The *Revue* criticism contained 201 lines; as there were two collaborators, each of them has a right to 402 lines, and if Æschylus had not been gathered long ago among the souls of the Pantheon, he too would have been entitled to 402 lines! It well-nigh makes criticism impossible. Francy if every playwright and actor were to refute our “notices,” as dramatic criticism is elegantly called in this country, at double space—why, in the days of the great Clement Scott, who dashed off a column and a half of the *Daily Telegraph* in an hour, it would mean nearly half a page of that journal! No, says a well-known writer, if things are allowed to remain as they are, criticism in future will have to be in this form—

“Mr. X. has just produced at the — Theatre a new piece of which I decline to give title or plot. This piece is no good.”

He cannot reply to that, according to law, because he is not named. On the other hand, suppose I had named and praised him—or any actor—what prevents him from claiming double space in “right to reply” because I did not praise him sufficiently? Why, the whole business is too ludicrous for words. And so say all of us.

CHAPTER XLVI.—March 12th, 1921.

The Case of our Actresses.

THE other day, when it was my privilege to address the Gallery First Nighters—that club of men and women of the workaday world who devote the best part of their leisure to the theatre, waiting in queues in all weathers, seeing every play worth seeing (and often otherwise), hallowing their Sundays by serious and harmonious discussion of their histrionic harvest—the debate turned on the women of our stage. And the inevitable question arose: “Have we great actresses?” We need not discuss the actors; we have them right enough. After much weighing pro and con, we arrived at a kind of consensus. “Yes, we have great actresses; but oh, so few!” Don’t blame me for the verdict—I was only one among the multitude; I was the auctioneer of the occasion, and time after time I asked for “any more?” But the bidding was lukewarm, and when the hammer fell we had five names wreathed in the aureole of “Greatness”; and let us candidly admit that, on the heinous principle of “out of sight,” we forgot the sixth—Marie Tempest. I could have whipped myself for not having remembered her, this Kitty and Becky of indelible memory, until the sobering east wind without recalled “things which I left unsaid” as is the penalty of discussion on the spur of the moment without notes or preparation. However, there were five, headed by Ellen Terry, supreme and *hors de concours*, as they say at the Salon in Paris; the undisputed Queen who bears her crown of seventy-three in evergreen laureate. In vain I pleaded for introspection, for addition to the number. I furrowed and burrowed my mental file of criticism of one year and several: there was no response—the plebiscite stopped at the quintette. It gave me much to think over. I was weighing in my mind this one and that one: it is one of my ideals to see the right person in the right place; but I had to silence my would-be preferments. “Greatness,” despite Press-agent, advertisement, boom, and first-night delusions, is an ominous word: to use it lightly is to degrade art to patent medicine or face-powder. “Greatness,” thrown in the diamond scales, is a thing that awakens, arouses, enraptures a people; it flits through the

land like a winged sentence ; it scintillates, it vibrates, it lives beyond the whims and tastes and moods of men. It carves names indelibly on the milestones of time. A great actor is discussed by coming generations in the same vein as a great general, a statesman, a builder of empires—the unheard echo of his fame sounds forth by tradition. . . .

A few days after this inspiring evening (for these knights of labour surpass in parlance and in thought most of the polished fatuities pronounced in pompous form in Society quarters) I left for France, and I made up my mind to see as much of the theatre as a well-earned holiday would allow—secretly to fathom why we are so much stronger on the male side than on the fairer one ; incidentally to find out whether it was true, which was printed some time ago in a London paper, that French acting had deteriorated since the war.

The latter part of the question may be at once dismissed. Whether you see plays in Paris—and oh ! the joy of Guitry in “ Le Comédien,” by Guitry’s boy, the heaven-blessed Sacha ! (see it, Arthur Bouchier, secure it at once ; the choice can only rest between you and Hawtrey) — or in the provinces, the *ensemble* is usually as round as a circle. Of course there are old ’bus horses, trotting in well-worn lines, *vieux chameaux du métier* who talk to the audience and at the audience—have we not got them too ? Of course there are *croûtes*—lovely word of theatrical *argot* for the inept, either pretty or partly bald, with no brains under their pates—have we not got them too ? Of course there are a few actresses propelled by other considerations than talent : that a certain number of them exist in the theatrical world of France it would be impossible to deny. But it would be equally untrue to say that they are representative. Of course, we have *not* got any actresses of that type in this country !

In our blessed land merit is the only passport, and sometimes the advertising manager and the Blue Book. But *generally*—I italicise that word—the French actress comes into her own : because she has been trained ; because she knows her business ; because she has graduated like a soldier ; because she has been moulded by a producer ; because

she is young and not afraid to look old—on the stage ; because she has no time or inclination for deification at “ five-o’clocks ” ; because she reads books and knows something of the dramatic literature of the world ; because she is an artist first and a lady after ; because she rarely marries into the Peerage to continue mediocre acting ; because she is merely somebody on the stage and, unless she be a genius, nothing in Society ; because she is criticised—often severely—and not “ shampooed ” by well-meaning and often purblind admirers who prefer her smiling nod to her cold shoulder ; because, at well-ordered theatres, especially in the provinces of France, she is engaged for a long season, instead of working in fear and trembling lest a poor run should cast her on the waters ; because—most potent “ because ” of all—she is endowed by Mother Nature with a temperament : not to fence with the word, but to explain it—because she has striven, struggled, lived, lingered, suffered ; because there burns in her the godly flame of warm blood and vocation. Because, in fine, to her the theatre is not merely an altar for the worship of “ I am I,” but the holiest of holies wherein to be canonised you must have the spirit of the Carmelite—ay, perhaps the soul of the pagan !—to reach the kingdom of the artistic heaven.

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Here, my readers, lies the difference between the French actress and ours. Her ideal is to aspire to the lofty heights of a Rachel, a Declée, a Sarah, a Duse. To reach them she will defy Calvary and Purgatory, sacrifice body, soul, and salvation. On our cooler strand the supreme price is ephemeral immortality in picture papers, “ among those present ” at functions, the blessing of Lady X. and Marchioness Y. and Countess Z., a marriage beyond one’s social station, applause when entering the stalls on a first night while resting from work, and generally such adulation as is not good for any young woman.

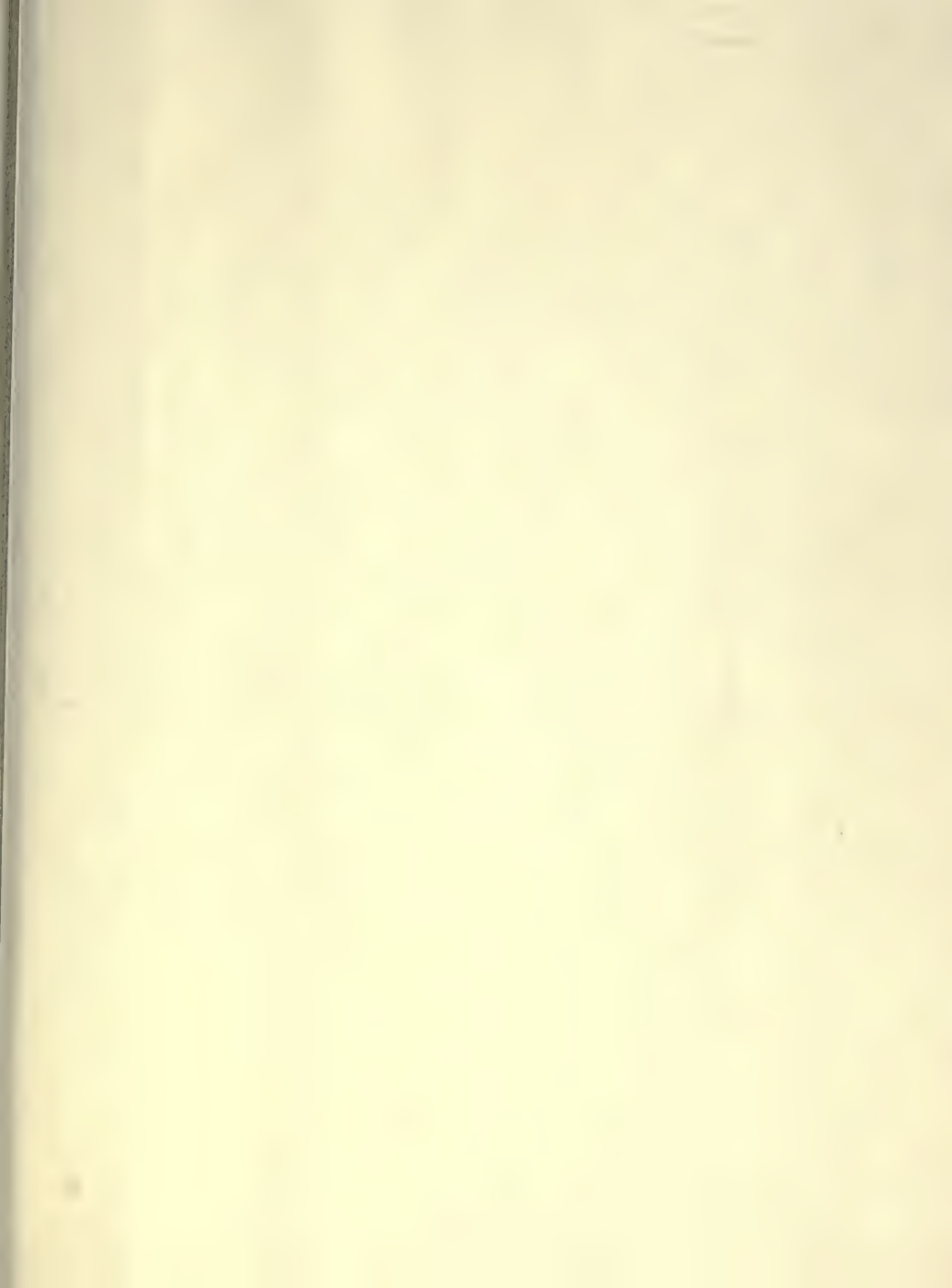
We cannot all have temperament—it is an endowment, like birth in a palace or in a mansion—but we can cultivate that which is in us beyond the drawing-room ballad and the pretty frock. Acting, after all, is a question of losing one’s personality in another incarnation—

a question of, once more to quote a poignant French saying, "*S'y mettre ou se démettre.*" When that portentous message is understood by our aspirants to a place in the sun, there is the luminous prospect that on our stage, as elsewhere in the community of life, our women will be the equal of men. But the road lies in the narrow, dark alley of the stage-door, whither grope the modest workers, not under the glittering chandeliers of Mayfair and the land of Jazz where the snapshot thrives and the paragraph.

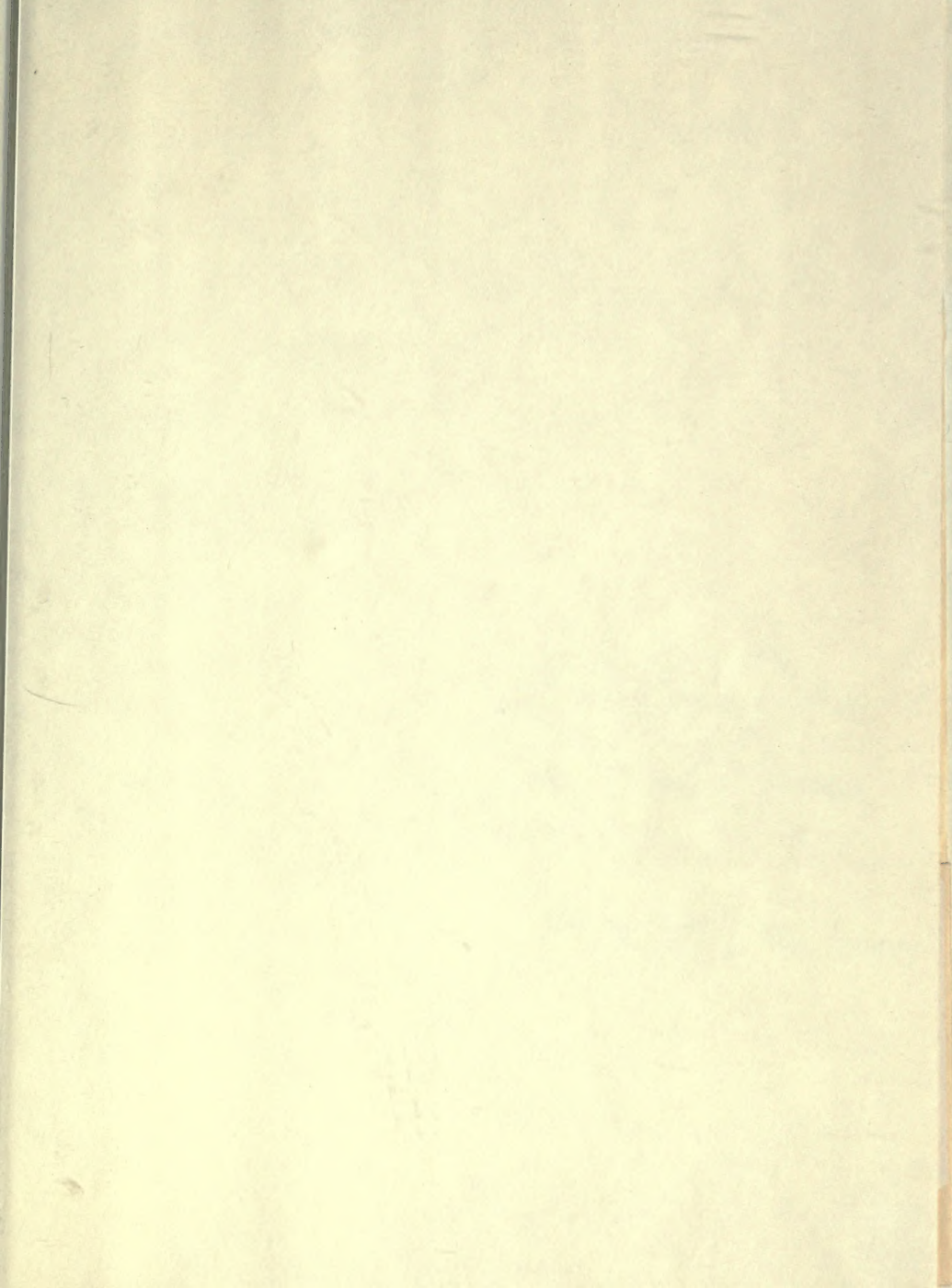
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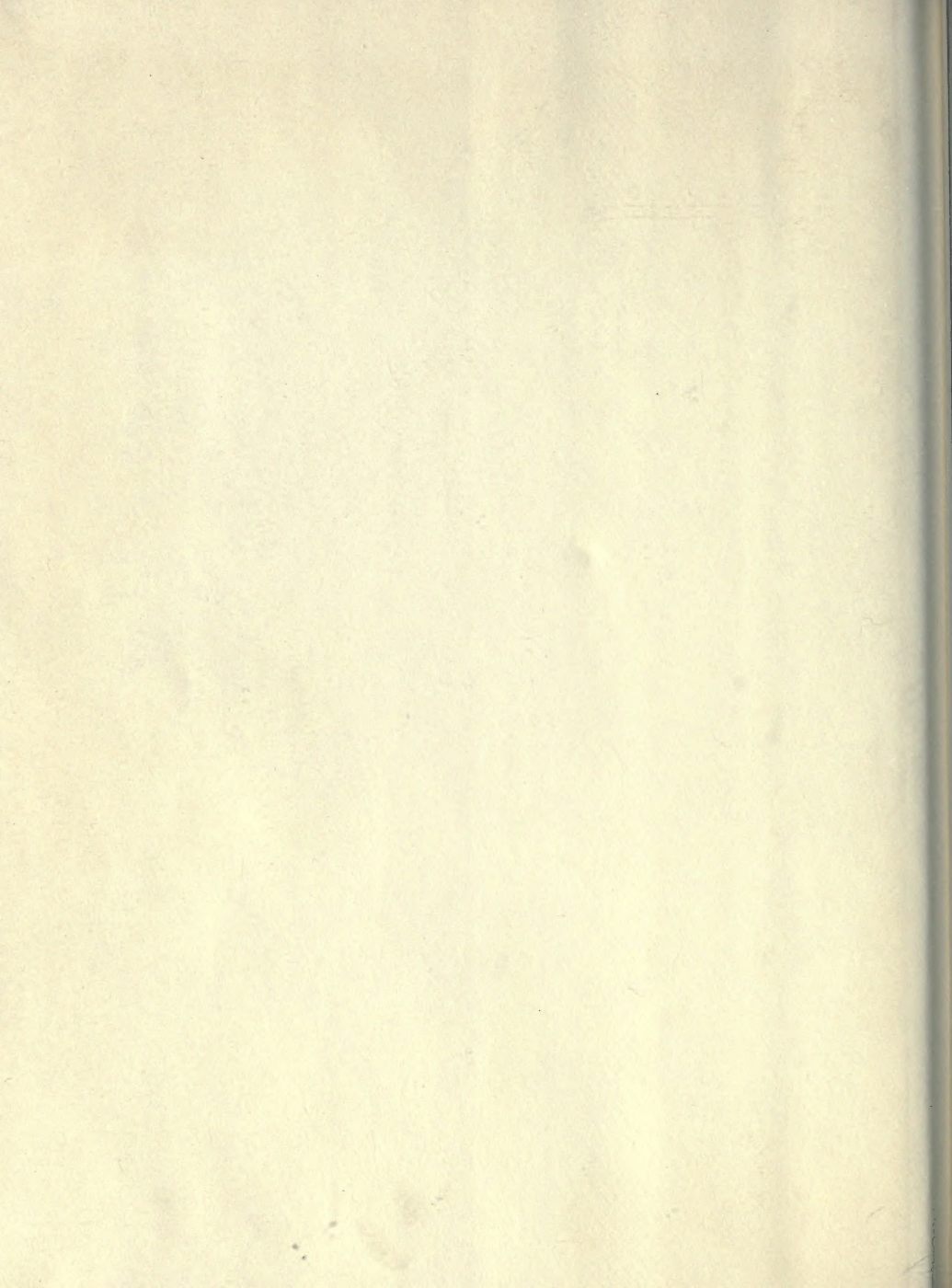
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